

Antioxidants and Exercise

Exercising can be hard on your body's cells, so it's important to eat plenty of **antioxidants**. These special food compounds can help protect your body's cells from exercise-related damage. Eating foods with plenty of antioxidants may help decrease the your muscle soreness after hard training sessions or competitions. They may also help keep you healthy all season long, especially when you're training extra hard. Common antioxidants include Vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, and selenium.

To up your antioxidants, eat more of these antioxidant-rich foods:

- Oranges, tangerines, and grapefruit
- Broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, and asparagus
- Cranberries, strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries
- Purple grapes, green grapes, and raisins
- Pears, peaches, cherries, and apples
- Watermelon and cantaloupe
- Sweet potatoes and yams
- Onions, peppers, and garlic
- Salmon, tuna, and sardines
- Nuts, seeds, and peanut butter

It's actually not that difficult to get in at least 6 servings of fruits and vegetables a day if you put your mind to it and get in the habit. A quick way to get started on bumping up your servings is to try juicing. You can start off your day off with a homemade juice combination like strawberry, carrot, and orange for a fast nutrient boost. It's one easy way to get some concentrated antioxidants in the morning. Or blend frozen bananas and blueberries with yogurt and take it with you out the door. Here are some other ways to plan your 6-a-day fruits and veggies:

Day 1

1. Have a large banana with breakfast (2 servings)
2. Choose a spinach salad with fresh veggies as part of your lunch (2 servings)
3. Add 1 cup of steamed broccoli to your dinner meal (2 servings)

Day 2

1. Drink 1 _ cups grapefruit juice with breakfast (2 servings)
2. Order a cranberry juice spritzer with your lunch (1 serving)
3. Choose a veggie stir-fry for lunch (2 servings)
4. For a snack, eat 2 carrots with lowfat dip (2 servings)

Including foods high in antioxidants in your sports nutrition plan may pay off in more ways than one. Studies find antioxidants may play an important role in preventing or treating health problems including heart disease, certain cancers (particularly prostate cancer), cataracts, and macular degeneration, two common eye problems. Although more research is on the way, choosing foods high in antioxidants is a good bet.