



# Sports Nutrition Myths

BY: MOLLY KIMBALL, RD, CSSD

*There are things we assume to be fact because... well, just because. Like if you pluck one grey hair, two will grow back (they won't), or that black pepper takes seven years to pass through the digestive tract (it doesn't). The same thing happens in the sports nutrition world. Here's a compilation of the top six myths. You may have believed some of these yourself!*

**MYTH #1:** If you stop working out, your muscles will turn to fat.

**THE REALITY:**

Muscles cannot transform into body fat. That's like saying an apple becomes a pear. They are two completely different entities. The reasoning behind this myth? Muscle is very metabolically active, burning many calories even at rest. So if a person does stop working out, they will likely lose muscle mass, which in turn reduces the calories they burn daily. If this person doesn't adjust his diet accordingly to take in fewer calories, he will gain body fat.

**MYTH #2:** Eat bananas to prevent muscle cramping.

**THE REALITY:**

Bananas have attained close to celebrity status for their potassium content. And, while they are a good source of potassium, they are certainly not the best source of potassium. Ounce for ounce, baked potatoes, white beans, red peppers, and cantaloupe pack more potassium than a banana. Not to mention, potassium is only one of several key electrolytes involved in muscle cramping.

Calcium, sodium, and magnesium are equally important in muscle contractions. A better remedy for muscle cramps: a carton of yogurt – it provides potassium, calcium and sodium, all of which work to prevent muscle cramping.

**MYTH #3:** You should always eat before exercise.

**THE REALITY:**

It depends. Listen to your body. You may find that even the lightest snack before a jog can leave you queasy. If that's the case, it's fine to exercise on an empty stomach so long as your workout will only be an hour or so, and you're not feeling lightheaded or dizzy.

What about before you strength train? Again, it can vary. A light weight-lifting session may be fine on an empty stomach. But tougher sessions (like one with a personal trainer) may require a light meal or snack, 30-60 minutes before the workout.

**MYTH #4:** It's best to eat less on days you don't work out.

**THE REALITY:**

If you train intensely, your body is relying on your rest days for muscle repair and growth. Avoid depriving your body of carb and protein calories on your off-days. Eating too little on rest days will delay your muscle recovery process.

**MYTH #5:** Carbs make you fat.

**THE REALITY:**

Consuming too many calories from any source can cause weight gain. Even so, carbohydrate-rich foods are what people most often reach for. Think pasta, accompanied by crusty bread, followed by dessert. Or the more subtle carb-filled snacks of crackers, pretzels, and granola bars. We're more likely to mindlessly indulge in carbohydrate-loaded foods without regard for portion size, surprised when we've wiped out the package without even realizing it.

**MYTH #6:** If you want to build muscle mass, you need loads of protein.

**THE REALITY:**

If you aim for 0.5 to 1.0 grams protein per pound of goal body weight, you have loaded enough protein. Your body will use a limited amount of protein for muscle repair and growth. Anything more will be converted (inefficiently) into energy as needed or simply stored as body fat.