Getting your diet right as a tennis player can be a tricky balancing act. Not only do you have to fuel yourself for a match that could last for an hour to three (or more!), you also have to be prepared for play at different intensities – at some points matches can be slow and at others involve hard fought energy sapping rallies.

When you are not competing, you also need to get your diet right in training and when travelling to competitions – which could sometimes involve going abroad. You also need to eat well so your body can last throughout the long competing season.

This means you need to have a good but adjustable diet which can fit in around all these factors.

Here’s how you can do so in the following situations…

**Between training sessions or tournaments:** Maintain a balanced diet with regular meals to provide all the main nutrients your body needs to stay healthy and illness free. Make sure you do not take in more food than you need or you could put on weight.

**Before a match or tournament:** You should always start any match with maximum glycogen stores and high levels of hydration. Breakfast will be your most important meal to set you up for the day so ensure you have plenty of complex carbs, like cereal or porridge. **Whatever time your match is, make sure you eat a meal with carbs and protein at least three to four hours before.** This will give your body time to digest and absorb the food preventing sickness and stomach upsets. Eat foods that you like and have had before training sessions and stay away from fatty and rich foods. If you have to wait a long time to play, have a small carbohydrate snack such as a cereal bar, banana or sports drink about an hour before to give you an energy boost without filling you up.

**During the match or training session:** Maintaining your hydration level is a priority so drink plenty of water and energy drinks. If the match or training session is a long one, then you will also need to eat some carbohydrates snacks to keep your energy levels high, such as cereal bars or bananas, between sets.

**After the match or training session:** Make sure you keep drinking water and that you have some **protein within an hour after playing.** This has been proved to be a very important part of your ability to recover more quickly. If you can manage to eat within 30 minutes of playing, that would be better, but most players find that very hard to do so. If you have another match within an hour or so, you won’t be able to have a big meal as you’ll be too bloated for the next match so instead keep your energy levels up by having a snack like a sandwich with a glass of fruit juice or milk and a yogurt and fruit.

**Top tips**

- Carry suitable snacks and drinks with you to tournaments. You never know when you are going to need a quick source of energy, and the club or center may not have the sort of food you like and need.
- Eat a balanced meal at least three hours before you play.
- Take in carbohydrates through snacks and sports drinks during matches and practise.
- Recover with a carbohydrate and protein meal within an hour or so after playing.
The tennis players diet discussed below is more than just eating healthy foods, but a highly systematic science of the proper nutrition needed for tennis.

A tennis players diet is different from a regular diet, in that the nutrition requirements are more specific and regulated. For players engaging in tennis training, a highly specialized tennis diet should be carefully planned and monitored.

In today’s modern tennis, players recognize the need of on court training as well as off court preparation. All of the intangibles must be in place before a tennis player can truly blossom and reach the next level. Too many players lack the off court tennis nutrition preparation needed to really succeed in a competitive tennis playing environment.

Eating a healthy and balanced tennis diet should never be taken for granted. In order to achieve peak performance in tennis, players must have adequate energy in their bodies for this level of performance.

Requirements of a Tennis Players Diet

Tennis is a sport that requires endurance, agility, speed and power. Thus every tennis player requires high energy storage to accomplish all these requirements. They also need protein to build up muscles and essential vitamins and minerals. For every tennis player to win tennis matches and tournaments, they must maintain proper diet not only during tournaments (diet before, during and after matches) but during tennis trainings as well. This is because an optimal tennis diet is built over time.

A tennis diet must be focused on high carbohydrate energy foods and adequate hydration. Tennis diet should also be timed appropriately especially during tournaments.

What is a balanced and healthy tennis players diet?

A balanced tennis diet is a diet that contains all the necessary components responsible for a healthy body. These components are: carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats, minerals and vitamins, and water or fluids. It is also ideal to eat fresh food rather than the readymade and processed food. Below are some guides on how to follow a balanced and healthy tennis players diet.

Main components of a healthy and balanced tennis players diet:

Carbohydrates in a Tennis Diet

Tennis players need to consume high amount of carbohydrates considering the amount of energy they loss during tennis trainings, practice and matches. Carbohydrates fuel muscles and avoid early muscle fatigue, thus increasing the player’s endurance. Tennis players normally lose 500 to 1500 of calories after every match. For a professional tennis player who has to play several matches in a tournament has to replenish carbohydrates loses by eating high carbohydrate foods. Any carbohydrate containing foods provide nutrients, fiber and above all energy.

A professional research showed that a healthy tennis players diet include 7-10 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram weight of the player’s body. It is also recommended to consume only the complex carbohydrates sources and avoid the simple sources of carbohydrates. Examples of high carbohydrate food that contain complex carbohydrates are pasta, rice, bread, oatmeal, potato, and other cereals.

Foods that contain simple carbohydrates such as chocolates bars, sugary drinks and so on should only be used for emergencies. Like for example, tennis players may consume snack chocolate bars during matches.
Protein in a Tennis Diet
A tennis player’s diet must also include protein. Protein is essential for the tennis players’ muscles build up. Protein is broken down into amino acids which are very important in muscle build up, hemoglobin formation and many others. Proteins also help players to recover quickly from long hours of matches and injuries.

For a healthy diet and to reach the protein requirement for tennis players, one should consume two to three servings of protein sources foods. Examples of protein sources: Oatmeal is a very good example of a cereal meal that provides good protein. Other examples of high protein source food are beans, eggs, meat (poultry, beef, port, etc.) fish, cheese, milk, yogurt and many others.

Fruits and Vegetables for vitamins and minerals in a Tennis Diet
Other important tennis players’ diet components include fruits and vegetables. They are the natural source of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other nutrients. For a healthy tennis players’ diet, a player has to have three to five servings of vegetables in addition to four servings of fruits. 1/2 cup of cooked vegetable of any type (e.g. spinach, tomatoes, and other vegetables) and fresh salads is equal to one serving. And one serving of fruits is ½ cup of any type of fruits such as the berries, apple, mango and many others.

Fats in a Tennis Diet
Fats may sound unhealthy but a tennis player’s diet should also include this component. This component of tennis player’s diet is responsible for the slowing down of the carbohydrates absorption of the body. This means that the fat component help in prolonging the energy supply of the body. This nutrient is vital in a tennis diet especially in sports like tennis where matches can last for hours. Examples of good source of fats are nuts (for players with no allergies to nuts of course) such as walnuts and almonds, natural peanut butter, high fat milk, olive oil, fatty fish (e.g. mackerel), and whole eggs. However, it should be noted though that appropriate amount of fat should be consumed. Too much or too little fat intake has its own disadvantages. Appropriate fat consumption is at least 15% of the dietary calories requirements. Very low (lower than the requirements) disallow the player’s body to absorb enough fat soluble vitamins such as Vitamin E which plays a vital role as antioxidants. Low fat diet restriction also put the players in limited food choices. The more varied food choices a tennis player has the better. In addition, since fat is responsible for the prolonged supply of body energy, very low fat intake can also decrease the player’s endurance and performance.

On the contrary, too much fat consumption can also lead to some health related issues. The most common issue related to extremely high fat consumption is the cardiovascular disorder. Furthermore, too much fat consumption can also result to slow and sluggish performance.
Breakfast is always the most important meal of the day not only for tennis players but for everybody. Breakfast is the key for any well versed tennis player’s diet. This meal is vital to replenish all the nutrients, minerals, glycogen, fluids during the whole night fasting. Tennis players normally have very low level energy in the morning before breakfast, thus it is important to include high carbohydrates in tennis players diet for breakfast. This means that the depleting glycogen in the player’s muscles is refueled and the player is able to start his day right.

The meal after breakfast can be consumed at smaller quantities but at more frequent intervals. Tennis players should avoid eating one big meal in a day and consume no more after is. Smaller but more frequent meals provide a constant supply of energy. In addition, eating too much meal may overload the digestive system which may cause several problems. One of which is the sluggish performance of the player. Lastly, bigger meals at a time can also results to the accumulation of fats due to improper digestion.
HYDRATION

Dehydration prevents your body and mind from working at its peak so if you fail to hydrate properly while playing tennis, it could cost you vital points leading to defeat.

Lack of recovery time during tournaments, hot weather, warm indoor courts and long, intense matches all increase fluid losses and make it more difficult to keep hydrated.

But you can stay on top of it by following our tips…

How to stay hydrated…

**Before you play:** Make sure you are well hydrated before you start or your performance will be impaired from the off. Consume 16oz of water the night before and about two hours before you play.

**During training or a match:** Remember to always have a supply of water and sports drinks with you – enough to last a long match. Start drinking two or three mouthfuls of water at every change of ends and more between sets. This will help you balance fluid losses. If the match goes on more than an hour, make sure you also have some sports drink so that you can replenish your electrolyte levels. Make sure you have tried the drink before and you know it does not upset your stomach. Different sports drinks suit different players so practice your hydration routine during training.

**After training or a match:** Try to consume more than the fluid you have lost. This will usually be 30-50 oz. per hour! Drink as much as you comfortably can and then continue periodically until you have met your needs. Remember that just because you stop feeling thirsty you may not be fully rehydrated but a visit to the bathroom could help.

**Top tips:**

- Start a match or training session well hydrated – if you are then your urine should be a pale straw color.
- Keep a supply of water and sports drinks with you during and between sessions.
- During exercise drink a few mouthfuls at every change of end and between sets in a match. Do the same every few minutes in practice so you get used to what you will do in a match.
- Drink after and between sessions even if you don’t feel thirsty.
- Monitor the color of your urine for signs of dehydration.