

Eating well to support athletic performance can be difficult – especially when you have a tight budget. How can you get the biggest bang for your buck and choose healthy options, all while shopping quickly and efficiently? Follow these quick tips to eat healthy on budget, save time, and, most importantly, fuel your body to perform your best.

### High Energy, Balanced Meals

If an athlete's training loads are not supported with adequate nutrition, they may experience low energy availability. This occurs when an individual does not match their energy or Calorie intake to the demands of training and their lifestyle requirements, leaving inadequate energy to support health and normal bodily functions.

- To better support your energy needs, include high Calorie, energy-dense foods throughout the day. Since there is no way to know exactly how many Calories you need in a day, eat mindfully so that you can pay attention to your hunger and satiety cues at each meal and snack. Also, pay attention to your overall energy levels from day to day.
- A balanced diet generally includes a source of carbohydrate, protein, and fat, as well as a fruit, and/or veggie, and/or legume. This 'balance and variety' does not have to be met within a particular meal or snack but should at least be considered when choosing foods in each 1/3 of the day. For example, morning, afternoon, and evening.

### Best Budget-Friendly Complex Carbohydrates for Athletes

Carbohydrates are your body's biggest source of calories. They're also typically the preferred fuel source for many athletes. That's because carbohydrates supply ample glycogen storage and blood glucose to fuel the demands of exercise, making carbs especially important for high intensity and long duration exercise.

### Budget-Friendly Sources of Carbs:

- Whole-grain breads including pitas, tortillas, flatbreads, dinner rolls, etc.
- Pasta. Try different kinds like high protein pasta, or pasta made from legumes.
- Starchy vegetables such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, peas, squash, etc.
- Whole grains such as rice, oats, quinoa, barley, etc.
- Legumes such as kidney, pinto, black, navy beans, chickpeas, etc.
- Fruits such as apples, berries, oranges, bananas, etc.
- Milk and yogurt.

*Quick Tip:* Although fiber-rich vegetables, including broccoli, leafy greens, and carrots are great sources of nutrition, they do not contribute a significant amount of carbohydrates or Calories.

### **Powerful Proteins for Athletes on a Budget**

Protein plays an essential role in sports nutrition since it provides the body with the necessary amounts of amino acids to help build and repair muscles and tissues. Athletes benefit more from spreading their protein intake throughout the day, rather than consuming their entire requirements at one meal.

#### **Best Sources of High-Quality Protein for Athletes on a Budget:**

- Lean meat and poultry, including chicken, turkey, beef, pork, etc.
- Canned tuna or chicken.
- Eggs and egg whites.
- Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese.
- Soy products such as soy beverage or tofu.
- Legumes such as kidney, pinto, black, navy beans, chickpeas, etc.
- Nuts, seeds and nut butters.

*Quick Tip:* If you choose to include protein powders, drinks, or bars in your diet, consume them during the part of the day where you have the largest gap in Calorie intake or are least likely to get a significant source of protein.

### **Healthy Fats for Budget-Conscious Athletes**

Fat is an important part of an athlete's diet. Generally, athlete's will get enough total fat in their diet if they are eating enough Calories to support their training needs. However, it is important to focus on including 'healthy fats' since these have the most nutritional impact on health and sport performance.

#### **Best Sources of Healthy Fats:**

- 'Fatty' fishes such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel (If those options are too expensive, buy canned tuna instead)
- Avocados (Get them when they're in season or on sale or look for frozen)
- Nuts and nut butters like peanut butter.

### **Tips for Planning Quick Easy Meals on a Budget**

**Make a menu plan.** Decide which meals you will make for lunch and dinner and make a list of the items that you will need from the grocery store. When you have a plan, you will be less likely to spend money on fast food and eating out. Aim to make at least 2-4 meals each week that require a bit more prep work and will leave you with some delicious leftovers.

**Keep a list of throw together meal ideas.** For those nights when you simply don't have the time to cook a substantial meal, have a list of your favourite balanced 'throw together' meals that use staple ingredients that you keep on hand. For example, scrambled egg wraps with some cherry tomatoes on the side; canned soup and a ham sandwich, etc. Remember, it's always better to eat something fast and easy after training than nothing at all!

**Buy semi-prepared items at grocery stores.** To save time, look for semi-prepared items such as whole roasted chickens or roasts, bags of pre-washed and cut veggies and fruit, fresh or frozen stir-fry vegetables, canned legumes, etc. Although the items may appear slightly more expensive, consider the amount of time you are saving on prep work as well as money generally lost to inedible parts of the broccoli or pineapple when you cut it yourself.

**Use ready-to-cook meals as your base.** Select a pre-cooked or ready-to-cook meal as the base for your meal and add other easy prepare items to balance it out. Try ready-to-cook meals from Costco such as lasagna, stuffed peppers, quiche, chicken chow mein, etc. For example: Pair the lasagna with your favourite bagged salad; roast some fresh asparagus and garlic bread to go with the stuffed peppers, an arugula vinaigrette salad with some fruit in it would be a great addition to the quiche, and you can add additional frozen stir-fry veggies and any leftover roasted chicken to the chicken chow mein to get some more veggies in your diet while also making the meal last longer.

**Plan your meals around foods that are on sale.** Check store flyers, newspaper inserts and coupon sites online. You may be surprised at the good buys available. Just be sure to buy and plan for foods that you will use so that they don't go to waste. **Quick Tip:** *Download the 'Flashfood app' to find amazing deals on ready to expire foods at Superstore.*

**Plan some plant-based meals every week.** Legumes (beans, lentils, dried peas), tofu and peanut butter offer great tasting protein at a good price. Don't forget about canned fish, like tuna and salmon. These can be an inexpensive way to get protein and omega-3 and last longer than fresh varieties.

**Check your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer.** Look at the expiry dates of the foods and ingredients you already have on hand. Which ones do you need to use up? Look for recipes that use those foods and ingredients.

**Enjoy grains more often.** Grains such as rice, pasta, barley, and couscous are inexpensive and can be used in many different recipes. Try them in soups, stews and salads such as Lentil Bolognese and Curry Chickpea Pasta Salad.

**Look for seasonal recipes.** Vegetables and fruit are less expensive when they're in season. Frozen and canned choices are also a good buy and can be just as nutritious.

**Plan to use leftovers.** If you're cooking roast chicken with rice and vegetables for Sunday night's supper, then make chicken sandwiches for Monday's lunch. On Tuesday, use the bones to make a chicken soup and toss in any leftover vegetables and rice.

**Make extras.** Don't let a big bunch of carrots or celery go to waste. Use it all up by making an extra big pot of soup. If ground beef is on sale, make two batches of lasagna instead of one. Serve one batch for dinner and freeze the other batch in meal-sized portions for another time.

### Quick Chickpea Chicken Tikka Masala

#### Ingredients

- 650 mL jar of Tikka Masala Cooking Sauce or equivalent (Available at Costco).
- 540 mL can of chickpeas.
- Leftover roasted whole chicken or chicken breast.
- 5 large carrots, chopped.
- 1 large bag of spinach.
- 2 cups of rice

#### Directions

- Cook 2 cups of rice with 2 cups of water (stove-top, rice cooker, instant pot, etc.)
- Chop carrots and add them to a frying pan with a small amount of olive oil and some water. Cook until tender. Add more water as needed.
- Once carrots are tender, add the can of chickpeas (rinse first), Tikka Masala Cooking Sauce, spinach and shredded chicken. Stir until spinach is wilted and sauce is heated through.
- Serve on top of cooked rice. Bon Appetite!