Missouri Sports Dietician Jana Heitmeyer knows that athletes must practice proper nutrition to perform at the highest level.

W hile strength and conditioning programs at colleges and high schools continue to receive great emphasis, there is a growing awareness that sound nutritional practices can also have a major impact on athletic performance. Strength training increases muscle, but without the proper fuel those muscles cannot operate at peak capacity.

For Jana Heitmeyer, Director of Sports Nutrition at the University of Missouri, eating right is an essential part of a comprehensive athletic training regimen. Her focus is working with members of Missouri’s nutritional and recovery programs.

AFM: How important is good nutrition for athletes that want to perform at the highest level?

Heitmeyer: Nutrition is the one thing that will set you apart from other elite athletes. E at think lean protein, always hydrate, start with breakfast, Think lean protein, eat often, and rest and recover. As they mature and continue through the program, we individualize more based on their body type/position and goals, as well as their daily schedule.

What role do Muscle Milk products play in your nutrition programs for Tiger athletes, specifically football players?

Muscle Milk products are used in every aspect of our training process. We use Muscle Milk RTD shakes for recovery throughout the day. We use Muscle Milk bars available for snacks throughout the day.

Missouri Sports Dietician Jana Heitmeyer

Is there something that coaches and athletes can do nutritionally that can contribute to greater stamina and endurance late in the game?

Hydration is a huge contributor to fatigue during game. Hydration needs to start at the latest, two nights before the game and focus on maintaining clear urine until after the game. Focusing on recovery throughout the week and not just the day of the game is also important. Lastly, you can maintain your energy levels by snacking during halftime on things like bananas, gummies, and Muscle Milk RTDs and bars.

Are nutritional programs for football players custom-designed based on their positions and/or body type?

We do a basic nutrition program called FASTER for all players. Faster stands for Fill up with fruits and veggies, Always hydrate, Start with breakfast, Think lean protein, Eat often, and Rest and recover. As they mature and continue through the program, we individualize more based on their body type/position and goals, as well as their daily schedule.

What should high school coaches be doing differently to nutritionally prepare football players to succeed in college?

Most high school kids want to get bigger and stronger. High school coaches should emphasize breakfast, real food first, and hydration. If they want a supplement, protein is the only thing we recommend. At least ninety percent of the time, the first thing we work on is eating breakfast. Empty tanks do not provide the energy needed to improve. Second thing is eating consistently three meals a day plus a pre-workout snack, then a bedtime snack. We emphasize peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as snacks instead of weight gainer supplements. Drinking water is the third thing we talk about on a daily basis. Since our muscles are made of water, they need to get in the habit of drinking water all the time, not juice or pop or energy drinks or even sports drinks.

You are a Registered Sports Dietitian. How has the role of “Sports RDs” grown and evolved in recent years in collegiate athletics?

Sports RD roles are evolving and becoming more integrated with teams. It used to be that all they did was education a couple times a year, no real contact with the athletes. Now our job has become that of an educator and counselor covering everything from dining hall menu planning and drug free sport has been an excellent partnership for us as we try to help our athletes navigate the world of supplements.

What do nutrition coaches do? How do you ensure that the sports nutrition programs you are using are safe and effective?

Nutrition is the one thing that will set you apart from other elite athletes.

-Jana Heitmeyer

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