

Peak Physical Condition Begins With Hydration and Diet

You cannot condition your body without a full understanding of proper hydration, and so many athletes overlook this vital aspect. The number one cause of poor performance in sports is dehydration. It is extremely important that you understand how much water you need to drink as well as when.

Another important aspect of peak conditioning is understanding your sports diet. Knowing what foods to eat, why you need to eat them, and when you need to eat them will help you perform at your best.

Remember that you are totally in control of your water intake and diet during performance, so listen to your body. Here are the facts about hydration and diet as they affect conditioning and performance.

Hydration

Start by hydrating your body with 60 to 100 ounces (2 to 3 L) of water each day, at a minimum. Your brain, muscles, and all neuroelectrical connections need sufficient body water and fluids to perform at their best. Your brain floats in water, and your muscles work in a water base. Once you are 30 percent dehydrated, you have lost your coordination, reflexes, power, speed, accuracy, and timing as well as your focus and concentration. Many athletes think they are not playing well technically when in reality they are dehydrated. Drink water all day every day before your match, and 60 minutes into your match add a Gatorade or electrolyte drink as well. Speed and timing all rely on electrolytes. And don't forget to hydrate after each match in preparation for the next one. You are hydrated if your urine is clear and not dark yellow, your saliva is clear and not white and foamy, and the whites of your eyes are white and not yellow. Jason starts to hydrate two days before each match and drinks 12 ounces (360 ml) of water each hour before as well as after his match.

In addition, wipe the sweat off your face, neck, and arms because your hot blood rises to the surface and needs to hit the cool air to lower your body's core temperature. If you are too sweaty, the hot blood cannot receive the cool air because sweat is covering the pores on your skin.

Diet

As a general rule, your muscles need a combination of foods because racquetball is very demanding on the body. You need protein (e.g., fish, chicken, beans) every day at least 90 minutes after practice to repair your broken-down tissues and cells. You need vegetables for electrolytes and quickness. You need fruit for circulation. And you need complex carbohydrate, glycogen, for muscle energy. The MyPyramid nutrition guidelines state that we need to eat from every category so that we replenish each and every nutrient. Keep your meals to the size of two fistfuls.

Match Tips

1. Do not eat within an hour of your match because you want your stomach almost empty and all of the glycogen in your muscles. A full stomach slows down reaction time.
2. Do not eat too much. Your empty stomach is the size of your fist, so a snack is one fistful. Perfect snacks are trail mixes, granola bars, power bars, a piece of fruit for fiber, vegetables, yogurt, bran muffins, or half a sandwich. Always have your own special food at the tournament because you never know what the club has as food choices.