

WRESTLING NUTRITION and WEIGHT CONTROL

Published by the Iowa High School Athletic Association

The keys to developing wrestling potential are a healthy, balanced diet, acquiring the needed wrestling skills, proper conditioning, and getting adequate rest. **By following sound advice about wrestling nutrition and weight control, wrestlers can improve their performance on the mat and in the classroom.** The benefits of proper nutrition and weight control, to the mind and the body, have been well documented. Likewise, the hazards of extreme weight loss and poor nutritional habits are also well documented. **Mood swings, irritability, decrease in academic performance, and loss of athletic performance can all result from extreme weight loss and poor nutritional habits.**

The **best weight for wrestlers**, or anyone for that matter, **is one that is safe and can be comfortably maintained by eating a healthy, balanced diet.** Wrestlers should be able to concentrate more on developing wrestling skills, than on maintaining, or losing, weight. Those who spend more time thinking about food, than wrestling, are probably trying to lose too much weight and/or eating the wrong foods.

Appropriate wrestling weight is that weight which can be maintained by eating a healthy, balanced diet. **Seven percent (7%) body fat for males, and 12% for females, has been established by many medical authorities across the country as the safe, minimal percent body fat for high school wrestlers.** Body composition assessment is the only scientific method of predicting a safe, minimal wrestling weight. By losing weight too quickly, or going below their safe, minimal percent body fat, a wrestler risks losing muscle along with fat. This results in decreased muscular endurance and strength. Not every wrestler can, or should, attempt to reach their safe, minimal percent body fat. A wrestler's lowest certifiable weight is not necessarily the weight he should be trying to achieve, but it is the minimum, safe weight he could achieve under ideal circumstances. Most high school wrestlers will perform very well at a body fat percentage above their safe, minimal percent body fat. **If a wrestler is above their safe, minimal percent body fat, there is no reason to believe that wrestling performance will improve simply by losing weight.**

If a wrestler does decide to lose weight to reach their lowest, certifiable weight, they should lose no more than 1 ½% of their body weight per week. The only way the body

can lose more than 1 ½% a week is through dehydration and/or excessively restricted food intake. Both of these practices cause the body to lose muscle and water along with the fat. **Dehydration and excessively restricted food intake result in decreased strength, muscular endurance, stamina, and concentration. Dehydration is the most detrimental method of losing weight** and causes the most rapid decrease in strength, endurance, and mental alertness. Research indicates that the **loss of as little as 2% of one's body weight through dehydration can cause significant performance loss!** A 2% weight loss for someone weighing 150 pounds is only 3 pounds!

To prevent dehydration, **the use of rubber, vinyl, and plastic suits, saunas, whirlpools, diuretics, or other methods of quick weight loss must be eliminated. They are against the rules, hurt performance, and can prove to be dangerous to one's health.**

A simple, effective method of determining adequate hydration is to check the color of one's urine! **Yellow urine indicates dehydration. Pale, or clear urine, indicates adequate hydration.** The following guidelines will also help ensure proper hydration: 1) drink at least 8, 8 ounce glasses of fluids a day, 2) drink 5-6 swallows of fluids every 15-20 minutes during exercise, 3) for each pound of weight lost during practice, drink 2, 8 ounce glasses of fluids, 4) thirst is a poor indicator of how much to drink; drink more than just enough to quench your thirst, 5) salt tablets increase the body's need for fluids. **DO NOT USE SALT TABLETS!**

Food choices wrestlers make during the season are going to determine how easy, or difficult, it is for them to lose, or maintain, weight. On a daily basis, most high school wrestlers should be consuming 8 servings of grain products, 3 servings of vegetables, 3 servings of fruit, 2 servings of low-fat milk products, and 2 servings of lean meat - depending upon body size and activity level. **Limiting fatty, greasy foods and those foods high in refined sugars will help ease the burden of weight control and weight loss.**

Carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy for wrestling. Eating foods high in carbohydrates is important to provide the body with the constant and immediate energy necessary for wrestling. **Complex carbohydrates, foods high in starch and low in simple sugars, are the best choice for your body's constant energy needs.** Choose foods high in complex carbohydrates by selecting foods such as - breads, bagels, muffins, rolls, pancakes, waffles, pasta, rice, potatoes (not French fried), cereal, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk, and juices. Avoid simple carbohydrates which are high in

simple sugars. Foods high in simple sugars - candy, cookies, cake, pastries, and pop - provide only very intermittent, short-term energy and are not the best choice of fuel for sports.

Fats provide long-term energy for your body, but they are more difficult for the body to use for energy, and contribute more readily to weight gain, than carbohydrates.

Wrestlers should limit their intake of fat by reducing the amount of pizzas topped with meat, hamburgers, French fries, bratwurst and other sausages, bacon, salad dressings, whole milk products, and high-fat gravies they eat.

Healthy snacks provide body with high amounts of complex carbohydrates and small amounts of fat and simple sugar. As healthy snack alternatives choose: pretzels, fig bars, air popped popcorn, fruits, vegetables, bagels, muffins, cereal, and low-fat yogurt - instead of chips, peanuts, ice cream, and pastries.

Adequate amounts of protein are needed to build and maintain body cells, help the body resist infection, and regulate body processes. Foods that provide the body with protein are: meat, milk and milk products, nuts, and dried beans and peas. **Selecting foods with adequate amounts of protein which are low in fat is preferred to high-fat choices.** Most athletes will not find it necessary to take protein supplements. There is no scientific evidence available proving that athletes eating a healthy, balanced diet need protein supplements to build muscles and increase strength. Eating foods high in carbohydrates will provide the energy needed to participate in strength training which will result in muscle growth and strength increases. Increased protein intake can result in increased risk of dehydration and additional strain on the kidneys.

Vitamins and minerals are needed for the growth of all body tissues, and the control of all body processes. Wrestlers eating a healthy, balanced diet should not have any difficulty consuming enough vitamins and minerals. If a vitamin or mineral deficiency is suspected due to a reduced calorie diet and intense training, a multivitamin or mineral supplement may be appropriate. It is not necessary for vitamin or mineral supplements to exceed 100% of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). **Before taking any nutritional supplement, it is best to visit with a physician or sports nutritionist for advice. Remember, nutritional supplements are just that, supplements to, not substitutes for, a balanced diet.**

To assist in keeping energy levels high and controlling weight, wrestlers should choose the following foods most often: breads, bagels, muffins, rolls, rice cakes, pita bread, pancakes, waffles, spaghetti, noodles, macaroni, rice, hot or cold cereals (except granola), fig bars, angel food cake, pretzels, graham and other low-fat snack crackers, air popped popcorn, low-fat milk, pudding made with low-fat milk, low-fat yogurt, sherbet, low-fat cottage cheese, fresh, frozen, or canned fruits or vegetables, dried fruit, fruit or vegetable juices, lean meats (10% fat or less), skinless chicken or turkey, broiled fish, reduced calorie dressings, mayonnaise, butter, or margarine, and dried beans and peas.

Wrestlers should choose the following foods less often: pizza topped with meat or extra cheese, any fried foods such as French fries and fried chicken, barbecue ribs, hot dogs, bratwurst and other sausages, bacon, sauces and gravies made from butter, cream, cheese, or meat drippings, salad dressings, butter, mayonnaise, or margarine that is not reduced calorie, whole milk and whole milk products, ice cream, candy, cookies, donuts, sweet rolls, cakes, pies, potato chips, nuts, snack crackers, luncheon meats that are not low-fat, oils and shortenings, and buttered popcorn popped in oil.