

Feeding A Wave Machine

NUTRITION ADVICE TO KEEP SURFERS STOKED IN AND OUT OF THE WATER

By Robin Nielsen, Nutrition Consultant

Surfing is a unique sport in several ways. You cannot eat or drink while doing it, and here in Northern California you must immerse your body in cold water – sometimes achingly cold water. Surfing is also an interval sport not dissimilar to tennis. It involves a series of sprints or short bursts of energy, whether paddling out to the break, paddling for a wave or dynamically charging down the line.

As such, surfing is a great form of exercise for building lean muscle. In particular, surfing can result in substantial gains in upper-body and core strength. Vigorous, sustained paddling can also boost cardiovascular endurance. However, you cannot build lean muscle, stay warm in the water or be a lean mean surfing machine if you don't provide your body with essential fuel: macronutrients (proteins, fats and carbohydrates) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals.)

If you've been to a local surf competition lately then you know the snacks provided to the competitors are often packaged, processed junk foods loaded with salt, sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils and preservatives.

While these foods may satisfy your immediate hunger needs, they provide little nutritional value and often require more nutrients to digest than the food itself provides. Over time you will have less and less energy for wave chasing and your body will feel stiff and lethargic.

To get your body better prepared for surfing – or, for that matter, any sport you want to enjoy for years to come – you should put in premium fuels that will increase your performance, ability to recover and overall health. Here are three simple tips that will help keep your fire stoked in and out of the water:

#1 Eat Whole Foods

When making food choices, ask yourself: Can you pick it, dig it, hunt it, gather it, milk it, or fish it?

Whole, real food contains the necessary macronutrients and micronutrients needed to sustain a healthy body. One lacking macronutrient in many people's diet is healthy fat. Yes, a healthy mix of omega 3s, 6s, 9s and saturated fats, my fellow surfers, is hugely important. Good fats, not hydrogenated or rancid fats, are an essential nutrient. That means we can only get them from foods – our bodies do not manufacture them. These essential fats keep our cell membranes fluid, reduce pain and inflammation, promote healthy skin, support our nervous system, and contribute to overall well being by feeding our brains. This means more flexibility, quicker recovery, improved reaction times, and, I'd dare to say, better karmic vibes in the water. They also help us to stay warm which is critical to enjoying the surf here in NorCal. Most of us should focus on getting more omega 3s, as we usually get plenty of the other form of fats. These can be found in whole grains, seafood (mostly cold water fish), nuts and seeds, particularly flaxseeds.

#2 Drink Lots of Water

To perform at your peak in the water you need to be adequately hydrated. The current rule of thumb is that you should drink roughly half your body weight in ounces daily. For example, a 140-pound person should consume approximately 70 ounces of water per day. You may need more if you exercise a lot, so pay attention to your body's needs. Those with a leaner body composition tend to stay hydrated better as lean muscle holds onto water and fat does not.

For surfers, hydrating can be tricky. Since you cannot drink once out in the water, you need to adequately hydrate before hand, yet not overdo it – unless you don't mind a full-bladder wetsuit flushing.

#3 Get Enough Uninterrupted Sleep

The optimal amount is anywhere from 7-10 hours depending on your age and health situation. Your body must have this time to rest for repair and re-building to prepare for your next surf session.

While eating well-balanced meals throughout the day and drinking enough water will prepare you for your surf session, many surfers simply stay out too long without refueling. If you're out for upwards of two or three hours at a time your surfing will likely be compromised by dehydration and fatigue. Some of the telltale signs you are in need of break are when you have a hard time catching waves and popping to your feet, you're wiping out frequently, or you want just one more "good" wave. Give your body a much needed break by paddling in and re-fueling. Two 45-minute sessions with a rest and re-fueling break in between is usually much more productive than one two-hour session.

Whether your surf style is "off the lip" or "toes on the nose," you can improve your stamina, agility, flexibility and frame of mind by giving your body the nutrients it needs, staying hydrated and getting enough rest. See ya out in the line-up! **ASJ**

Robin Nielsen is founder of Juvenescence, a nutrition consulting practice in Morgan Hill, and co-founder of Surf Sol Sister, which offers wellness retreats for first-time and seasoned long boarders. She can be reached at robin@surfsolsister.com.

PRE-SURF SMOOTHIE

Here is a pre-surf meal to keep your energy up. Mix in blender and drink it about one hour before your surf session.

- 1/4 cup raw almonds pre-soaked for several hours and rinsed
- 1 cup purified water
- 1/2 banana raw or frozen
- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen organic berries
- 1 tbs ground flax seed
- 17-25 grams whey or brown rice protein powder*
- 1 tsp green food (optional, for an extra boost of nutrients)

**This amount of protein is for a typical adult. Whey to Go by Solgar or Protein Energizer Powder by Rainbow Light is my favorite store choice (blend whey gently to retain its nutrients).*

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