

## **Best Foods for Recovery**

What foods are best to eat after exercise to promote recovery? I hear this question with increasing regularity as people are becoming more aware of the importance of recovery. This is a good sign because it means most are starting to truly understand just how fitness is improved. Simply put, stress (training) combined with adequate rest and proper nutrition is the recipe for improved performance. Interesting to note, the better the nutrition, the less rest needed, therefore the faster performance improves.

Recovery from a workout actually begins before the workout has begun. What I'm suggesting is that it is not in the athlete's best interest to break down his/her body in a way that will not result in improved performance. For example, if an athlete embarks on a run without being adequately hydrated, an unnecessary stress is being placed on the body. The athlete will experience a higher heart rate due to inadequate hydration, fitness will not improve as a result and fatigue will occur sooner. As a consequence, recovery will take longer, yet there will be no pay off in terms of improved fitness. For recovery time to be minimized it's important to make sure the body is properly prepared to take on the stress of exercise.

Immediately following a workout, once hydration has been achieved, the best foods to consume are fresh fruit with a small amount of protein. Fresh fruit is easy to digest and the naturally occurring sugar it contains helps to quickly restock depleted muscle glycogen stores. The protein further speeds the up-take of sugar into the system. However, the amount of protein should be small at this meal, comprising of 25% or less of the total number of carbohydrate grams, and. A snack should be consumed within 45 minutes from the time the workout has ended. If the body is made to wait longer, recovery will be impaired.

Once about an hour and a half has passed since finishing the snack, a balanced, nutrient rich, easily digestible meal is optimal. I recommend a nutritious blender drink containing all the components of a complete meal. The reason I recommend a liquid meal is to further reduce the strain on the digestive system during the recovery period. When the body is pooling all its resources to help repair damage done by training, it needs all the help it can get.

The best sources of protein are hemp, pea and rice in powder form, mixed with water. I like hemp protein especially because it is raw, chlorophyll-rich and contains anti-inflammatory properties that help soft tissue repair. pH is also an important factor to be aware of when making a recovery meal as lactic acid is a by-product of exercise. The consumption of plant-based alkaline forming foods will help to neutralize the typically acidic pH of a fatigued body, thereby speeding recovery.

The most alkaline foods are those with the highest chlorophyll levels – dark, leafy greens are ideal. I recommend a daily salad for this, among other, reasons. However since dark, leafy green vegetables aren't great for making blender drinks, I use chlorella. Chlorella is a fresh water algae from Japan. It possesses the highest amount of chlorophyll in nature,

is rich in vitamin B-12 and contains almost 70% protein. An excellent addition for anyone, especially a vegan athlete, I recommend 1-2 teaspoons of chlorella in each blender drink.

Maca is also an excellent food to help speed recovery and promote energy without stimulation. Grown in the Peruvian highlands, maca is a turnip-like root vegetable. Available at many health food stores in powdered form, maca helps to nourish and rejuvenate the adrenal glands. After training or any other type of stress the adrenals become fatigued. If the stress becomes chronic and not enough time is allowed for recovery, common symptoms of stress become apparent. As with chlorella, I recommend adding 1-2 teaspoons of maca in each blender drink.

Here is an example (from my book THRIVE) of a blender shake I make to supply me with all the nutrients I need to optimize recovery, and therefore performance:

### **Nutrient-rich shake**

3 cups water (or 2 cups water and 1½ cups ice)	
1 banana	– electrolytes
½ cup blueberries	– antioxidants
½ pear	– natural sugar, fibre
1 tbsp hemp oil	– essential fatty acids (3-6)
1 tbsp ground flax seeds	– omega 3, fibre
2 tbsp hemp protein	– complete protein
1 tsp (2.5 grams) maca, powdered form	– sterols, alkaloids glucosinolates
1 tsp (2.5 grams) chlorella, powdered form	– vitamin b12, chlorophyll, nucleic acids

Blend together until smooth.

For variety, add either a tablespoon of raw pumpkin or sunflower seeds. Raw carob powder is also a good addition.

The ease of digestibility, the high pH (more alkaline), the raw protein source, and the nutrient density are all major advantages that post workout vegan food sources have over animal based ones. Vegan or not, for the first few hours after a workout, abstaining from animal products can facilitate a quicker recovery.

*Brendan Brazier is a professional Ironman triathlete, two-time Canadian 50km Ultra Marathon Champion and bestselling author on performance nutrition. He is also the creator of the award-winning VEGA line of whole food products.*  
[www.brendanbrazier.com](http://www.brendanbrazier.com)

*Brendan's latest book, *The Thrive Diet* (Penguin, 2007), includes 100 balanced, plant-based, whole food recipes. [www.thrivediet.com](http://www.thrivediet.com)*

