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Sports Stack

A Flexible Nutrition Plan

Written by [kylestack](#) on 9/22/2011 12:07 PM

Athletes adjust their training regimen depending on the time of year. That seems like a no-brainer. It wouldn't make sense for them to exercise the same way, whether it's in-season or the off-season. It also doesn't make sense for them to eat the same way throughout the year, which is why nutrition periodization is becoming a priority among athletes, according to Rikki Keen, a dietitian who consults NFL players and endurance athletes. It's a sensible direction for athletes to take, but it seems to take on more importance in sports with extended off-seasons.

I first became aware of this topic last year while writing a story for Weight Watchers Online for Men about winter Olympians' nutrition plans. Dietitians at the Canadian and American Olympic training centers explained that their athletes tax their bodies in a myriad of ways – timing their training so that they are in peak form for the two-week Olympics period being the top priority. I was impressed by how disciplined their diets were; a recent phone interview with Keen enlightened me to how prevalent it's becoming among athletes in at least one mainstream sport – football.

She said that nutrition periodization has taken off over the last five years. While they ate the same way year-round before, NFL players have embraced it because of the sporadic training methods they employ during the calendar year. Their energy output in April – the middle of the off-season – is far different than October, the second month of the regular season.

Carbohydrates take on more importance during the season, when their bodies need more energy to get through practice and games. Keen emphasized that the quality of the food they eat should never waver; it's quantity that can change and carbs are a reflection of that.

However, I don't presume this would be a difference-maker for other athletes, such as golfers or tennis players. Those sports have a short off-season, so its players generally maintain the same energy output throughout the year.

But nutrition periodization can certainly play a role in football, baseball, basketball and any other sport in which there is a significant off-season. Athletes, particularly NFL players, are known to over train in preparation for a new season. An increasing awareness among athletes for how to optimize their training should include nutrition periodization.

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