

Sports Nutritionist

Spotlight

The foods that a professional powerlifter eats may not be the same as those that a swimmer or a dancer eats. A sports nutritionist is somebody with the expertise in food, exercise, and fitness to advise athletes on what to eat to maximize their performance and fuel their bodies.

Personal Connection

Sports nutrition is about helping athletes be the best they can be through food. It takes a lot of knowledge about food and nutrition as well as the ability to see each client as an individual. Becoming a sports nutritionist is all about the care factor, along with learning about the science behind physical well-being, food, and athletic performance:

- Do you love food?
- Are you passionate about choosing what you put in your body?
- Are you highly active and love to move, run, dance, or play sports?
- Do you love helping people and giving advice?

Other Connections

Even if you don't end up becoming a sports nutritionist, there are many different career paths that are involved in and are a part of helping care for people, including:

- Designing nutrition programs to improve or maintain the health of patients as a preventive measure against heart disease or obesity or for therapeutic reasons, including to help a patient maintain baseline nutrition as a clinical nutritionist
- Explaining nutrition issues to people in at risk communities and developing meal plans that account for cost and cultural preferences as a public health nutritionist
- Conducting periodic food safety audits to determine if the client organization is in compliance with requirements, for the purpose of certifying the organization's food safety management system is up to standard as a food safety auditor
- Working in public health education or outreach, becoming an advocate for healthy eating and physical fitness, as a nutrition educator

Fun Facts/ "Did You Know?..."

Some fun trivia about sports nutrition:

Learning how to reach your athletic peak: Did you know that sports nutrition has a different level of complexity from regular nutrition due to the concept of peaking? Athletes need to achieve their peak, or highest level of performance, at a very specific point during their season, and a nutritionist has to help them achieve this by advising their diet not just in a single instance but also in terms of changes over time. [Read more here.](#)

Survival facts that might interest you: You can survive for a month without food, but only a few days without water. So some of the best advice a nutritionist can give is, "Drink more water!" [Read more here.](#)

How to trick your scale: If you weigh yourself right after you work out, you're likely to be lighter than you were when you started. Don't get too excited, it doesn't always mean you've burned a ton of fat. In fact, most of the immediate weight loss during heavy exercise is from water lost during sweating. [Read more here.](#)



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STEM Connection

The field of sports nutrition and performance is full of interesting gadgets and devices to help people track and improve performance. Here are just a few ways that new and emerging technologies are transforming the field of sports medicine:

- Apps and data analysis personalize nutrition advice: One of the latest trends in sports nutrition is the emphasis on personalized nutrition, where nutrition advice is based on an individual's specific needs down to the cellular level. Various companies and research firms are collecting vast amounts of data and conducting rigorous analysis in order to create predictive models that can instruct consumers on the best diet based on things like their microbiome or blood glucose levels. Learn more about the latest innovations in personalized nutrition [here](#).
- Wearable technology tracks performance: It is now commonplace for athletes to wear devices while exercising that track their energy expenditure. Nutritionists are able to analyze this information in order to create diet plans that meet the energy requirement needs of their athletes. Learn more about wearable technology like Fitbit [here](#).
- Innovative nutrition supplements: Nutrition supplements are only becoming more important in the athletic world. New evidence comes out every year that points to a new ingredient and its role in athletic performance, and it is up to sports nutritionists to interpret those studies and decide how to incorporate the latest scientific findings into the diets they prescribe. Check out some of the latest advances, from milk made from peas to branched-chain amino acids [here](#).
- High-tech kitchens: The latest technology means that a nutritionist can monitor their clients at all times. People interested in making serious nutrition adjustments can purchase tools like special scales or smart plates that track what you eat and upload your foods to an electronic portal so that your nutritionist can monitor your intake. [Learn more here](#).

Articles, Videos, and Podcasts of Interest

In this [Ted Talk](#), Brendan Brazier talks about how to find your athletic edge. He talks about the topic from the perspective of a sports nutritionist and former Ironman champion.

This is a great introduction to a career as a sports nutritionist from Arizona State University. It's focused on what its like to be a sports nutritionist, including a "day in the life" section. [Learn more](#).

A clear understanding of the career path to becoming a sports nutritionist will help you succeed. [This guide](#) from a nutrition education website is all about pursuing sports nutrition and includes a database of schools that offer nutrition programs.

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Journeys to Becoming a Sports Nutritionist

In contrast to other careers in sports medicine and health, a huge part of sports nutrition is giving advice. It's not enough to understand factual material. You also have to understand what it's like to be an athlete and be able to empathize with the needs of your clients.

Read below about how one young athlete ended up becoming a sports nutritionist:

Taylor Renko is a registered dietician who focuses on pediatric sports nutrition. She now runs her own website and wellness brand, Taylored Nutrition. She also spent her childhood training intensively to be an ice skater and as a middle-schooler picked up cross-country.

She realizes that she didn't exactly follow the best sports nutrition advice during her own training. "So, for a while, my food intake most days was too little to support all of my training and, on top of that, the food choices that I did make were not always the ones I needed," she writes.

When high school came and she started working to improve her times, she started realizing how important nutrition is for a performing athlete. This is what inspired her to pursue sports nutrition as a career. She graduated with a bachelor's in nutrition from Texas Christian University and completed the dual dietetic internship and master's program at the University of Memphis. Finally, she holds a master's in clinical nutrition.

Taylor loves that she can help people with her work: "My food and nutrition philosophy is that all foods fit and that every athlete's body is different and needs a different nutrition strategy. I don't do diets but I do help athletes and their families understand what nutrients they need," she writes.

Read more about Taylor on her website [here](#).

Read about another sports nutritionist who got his start as a high school athlete:

Pratik Patel is the Director of Performance Nutrition for the New York Giants and is responsible for ensuring all players are eating the best diet for their athletic needs, from getting enough protein to focusing on anti-inflammatory foods after practice. Pratik's interest in nutrition started when he was a high school athlete and spent his free time reading about nutrition in various magazines and testing out theories on himself. He monitored how his own athletic performance changed as he ate different foods and saw firsthand the impact of proper nutrition.

Pratik entered college as an engineering student but opted to switch into the sports nutrition program. He originally thought he would work at a gym and combine nutritional advice with personal training, but as he gained more experience through his internships, he saw the possibility of serving as a nutritionist for sports teams and elite athletes. Pratik says that sports nutrition is a rapidly evolving field, and so anyone interested should think about speaking with a dietitian and try to get hands-on experience. Pratik also says that at the end of the day nutrition is a people-focused profession, so successful sports nutritionists not only know the science behind nutrition but are also good at building rapport with athletes and developing trusting relationships.

Learn more about Pratik's path and his experience in the NFL [here](#).

