



NHB Helpful Hints



Important Nutrition Information for Young Dancers

Looking around, it seems that nutrition has become a very complicated topic. Truly, all that needs to be remembered is that food is the fuel that keeps our bodies running. How well or how poorly your body runs, depends upon the quality of the food you put in it.

Young dancers need fuel to keep their bodies growing and to supply energy for class and rehearsals. The current low-carb diet fad operates on the theory that when deprived of carbohydrates, the body will burn fat. While this is indeed the case, dancers and athletes rarely have an excess of fat to burn. The body's first response when energy is needed is to process carbohydrates. It takes twenty minutes for the body to even mobilize fat to be processed!

Since most dance classes are held in the late afternoon, it is important that dancers eat a light, healthy snack in between lunch and class to keep energy at a constant level. The body will convert foods that are high in sugar to energy very quickly. This process creates an energy surge that is often followed by a drop in energy levels. Ideal snacks for dancers are yogurt, yogurt smoothies (be sure to read labels – some are mostly sugar), fruit, peanut butter and jelly on dark breads, cereals that are high in fiber and low in sugar content and crackers made with wheat or rye flours.

Dancers who spend Saturdays and/or Sundays in class and/or rehearsal should prepare nutritionally the night before. A pasta meal will supply early morning energy, and eating a full breakfast that includes carbohydrates, fats and proteins will help keep the energy level constant. The same is true for performances.

Dancers also need to consume 8-10 glasses of fluid per day. Water is the best choice but diets should also include milk. While fruit juice is a healthy alternative to soda, it is important to remember that it is high in sugar and digested very quickly. Calcium intake should also be a concern since bone building reaches its peak during the teen years. Also, keep in mind that caffeine does interfere with how effectively our bodies are able to absorb the calcium we consume.

This information is meant to help people understand the best way to fuel dancers' bodies. Eating healthy also means that it is okay to celebrate after the Nutcracker with a delicious hot fudge sundae. It will taste wonderful but would not have provided energy that would last if it had been eaten before the performance!!