



Food For Thought

By: Dara Vint

Dara Vint is a current UDA instructor working on a minor degree in Dance Performance at Missouri State University. She has danced competitively for thirteen years and is currently a student choreographer and dancer in the Missouri State University Theatre and Dance Department. She is a member of the University's Inertia Dance Co. and has traveled to perform across the mid west and east coast.

Dancer's make up some of the most versatile athletes. In order to execute a dazzling performance their body *and* mind must be completely in synch. Dancer's need strength, stamina, energy and a clear mind to perform at their best. With extensive amounts of physical activity, long practices, and performances a dancer must be consuming enough calories to maintain his/her energy. A dancer's diet should be comprised of approximately **60% carbohydrates, 15% protein** and **25% fat**.

Carbohydrates are an athlete's prime source of fuel for both their brain and muscles. Dancers, with all of their required activity, are no different. They need to make sure to stay smart when consuming their daily sources of carbohydrates and stay away from the simple carbs, like sugar. The majority of their carbohydrate intake should come from more complex carbs such as whole grains, wheat bread, fresh vegetables, and cereal. When pouring a bowl of cereal, try to avoid the sugary types such as *Fruit Loops* and *Frosted Flakes*, and stick to *Cheerios* with fresh fruit added in or other whole grain options. For dinner or lunch try some whole grain pasta or make your own chicken quesadilla substituting a whole grain sandwich wrap for the flour tortilla and filling it with fresh vegetables!

To maintain a dancer's muscle mass one needs to be sure to consume adequate sources of protein everyday. Chicken, turkey, fish are all great lean sources of protein as well low-fat dairy products (skim milk, yogurt, low-fat cheese) and nuts. Red meats do contain protein, but can also be very high in saturated fat. These saturated fats are essentially unable to be digested or burned off, even for an active dancer. At the next team get together opt for grilling chicken or fish instead of barbecuing hot dogs and hamburgers! If you're not much of a *meat* person, soy, beans, and tofu can all satisfy your daily protein needs!

Though dancers are constantly under the spotlight and can more often than not be body conscious in their leotards, *fat* is an extremely important part of the diet! Fat sources provide nutrients that promote healthy brain and nerve function and allow the body to break down vitamins found in the other suggested healthy food options. As active as a dancer's body *and* mind have to be, diet plans that cut out all fat content will not be in one's best interest. It is not how much fat one consumes, but what kind of fat you're putting into your diet. Beneficial, **unsaturated** fats can be found in nuts, seeds, olive oils, and the low-fat dairy items that are already giving your body significant nutrients.

Eating healthy foods and at regular meal times will condition your body to perform at its peak, but don't forget to pack a snack for those long practices, too! Try hard to stay away from the sugar in fruit snacks or the simple carbohydrates in a snack bag of chips. Those will only cause you to be drowsy once their simple carbohydrates have been burned off. Make your own trail mix with a variety of nuts, seeds and maybe even some dried fruit! It's healthier and easy to slip into a Ziploc bag and into your backpack. Pack a peanut butter and banana sandwich on a slice of whole wheat bread. Substitute some pita chips and hummus over a cupcake before a game performance, or eat a cup a non-fat yogurt as your walking out of the house for practice. They are simple, but contain the proper amount of nutrients, complex carbohydrates, protein and fat to do the trick of keeping your mind *and* body dancing healthy!

Sources: Livestrong.com (Dancer Diet Articles), teenhealth.com the physical training/ nutrition department Iowa State University.