

Dance Nutrition

How to Build a Good Relationship with Food and Optimise Performance

Food is fuel and how you fuel your body can have a significant impact on your development as a dancer. Your long-term nutrition can affect your physical, psychological, and emotional health; all of which make up your unique artistry.

Here are three tips that can help you improve your nutrition, nurture a positive relationship with food and your body, and optimise performance.

1. Eat Enough

The most fundamental eating strategy that is often overlooked in dance nutrition is eating enough. Your dancing body requires a lot of energy to fuel your movements and fine tune the precision.

Imagine flying on a plane from Sydney to London, direct. You take a seat and the pilot makes an announcement: "Welcome on board! We are flying to London today and we are only carrying 1/3 of the fuel we need"

How would you feel?

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Scared, anxious, worried?

That is exactly how your body feels when you are under-fuelling or restricting food. It can lead to nutritional imbalances and physical consequences such as increased risk of injury and longer duration to recover from an injury.

To ensure you are eating enough, create regular eating times that suit your schedule and enjoy a variety of foods as stated on the next section.



2. Enjoy a Variety of Foods

Your body needs nutrients from five key types of food every day:

- Energy foods – grains, rice, bread, cereal and their families
- Bone-building foods – dairy and non-dairy calcium foods
- Muscle-building foods – fish, meat, poultry, eggs, beans and nuts
- Vegetables
- Fruits

These foods help you sustain metabolism, energy, muscle strength and mass, and overall wellbeing. Eating from all these types of foods will ensure you get adequate amounts of the following three big macronutrients that your body needs to sustain life:

1. **Carbohydrates** – to give you the energy to fuel you during your lessons and movement throughout the day
2. **Protein** – to help build your muscle, tone and strength
3. **Fat** – to help make cells and hormones, and enhance absorption of certain micronutrients necessary for health

These foods also contains micronutrients (commonly known as vitamins and minerals), which are necessary in small amounts for the body to function optimally.

3. Ditch the Diet Mentality

Easier said than done, I know. Stay with me here and I will explain why this is key.

The aesthetics of ballet make it almost impossible to not obsess about one's weight and shape. This obsession and pure focus on weight does too much harm, to the point where it can damage your career as a dancer.

Dieting to lose weight leads to more injuries, weak bones, muscle loss, eating disorders, lack of brain power, and poor focus.

What can you do instead?

You can channel your desire to improve your performance and focus on healthful, nourishing way of eating.

Having positive thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards food and eating can improve your body's ability to digest, absorb, and metabolise nutrients.

By not obsessing on your weight, you will find it much easier to eat enough, which leads to improved performance. You will also have more capacity to focus on other important things in life, both within and outside of dance.

Your worth as a dancer is NOT determined by your weight or size.

