



Doctor in the Kitchen®

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ATHLETES AND NUTRITION

Athletes and athletic coaches are just as susceptible as other people to falling for food faddism. In fact, they may be even more susceptible since athletic performance is equated with physical health and, if one is ignorant of the basics of nutrition, it is easy to succumb to "quick results" schemes and "miracle" ideas.

As a physician in charge of a university's health services and as team physician for one of the Big Ten football teams, I have observed that things are better than they used to be. Coaches are learning more of the facts of nutrition science. But around the country there still are a lot of coaches and athletes subscribing to "weird" ideas, special foods and special diets.

No Miracle Foods

The fact is, there simply are no miracle foods, or food components, or mixtures of special foods that are going to improve an athlete's performance. He needs the same foods that are recommended for everybody else. If the athlete follows the four-food-group pattern — milk, meat, fruits and vegetables, enriched or whole grain breads and cereals — he'll

be fine.

The young athlete needs them, of course, in greater quantities because he's using up greater amounts of energy at the same time that he is in a period of physical growth that may be critical.

Nutrient-wise, the diet that will provide the best performance contains approximately 15 percent of his calories from protein, 40 percent from fat, and 45 percent from carbohydrate — the same as the average American eats every day. Higher protein diets cause problems, especially when the weather is hot and water is limited. A pure carbohydrate diet results in difficulties including the athlete being unable to retain water. And too high a fat content in the diet, particularly in cold weather, causes problems too technical to discuss here, but real nevertheless.

Some coaches like to "spook" their athletes with special supplements such as wheat germ, tiger's milk — that sort of thing. They are perfectly sincere but if there is value in such practice it may be more in terms of "psyching" a boy rather than improving his nutrition. We know from U.S. Army nutrition research and survival tests that I was associated with that notions not based on scientific fact are useless and sometimes dangerous.

My Pet Peeves

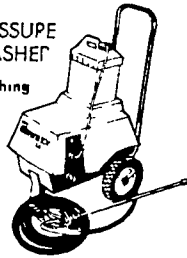
I also have a pet peeve about athletes eating differently on game day. Players have their regular breakfast and lunch on practice days. So why not on game day? Why upset the body's normal metabolic habits by observing a different eating pattern on game day? The only real caution necessary is that obviously one does not eat immediately before a game. That, of course, would be foolish. But athletes should stick as close to their everyday eating patterns as possible for best performance.

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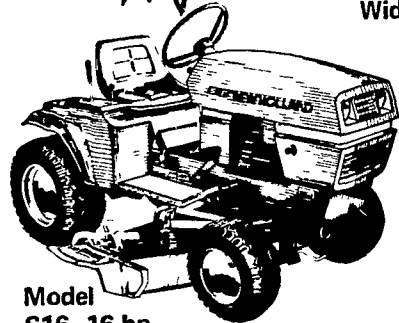
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Preventing Accidental Poisonings

When children are too young to understand safety hazards, James E. Van Horn, Extension family life specialist at The Pennsylvania State University, says it's best to simply keep poisons where they can't be reached.

Van Horn suggests you lock them in a cabinet or closet. If there isn't room to lock them up, store them in high cupboards, well above a child's reach, even when he learns to climb. If they are out of sight, they won't excite the child's curiosity about the "pretty bottle" or the "blue and red pills."

When you are using a cleaner or other poison and must leave the room, Van Horn urges you to take the container with you. Then you know your child is not eating or drinking what's inside.

Children learn by imitating

adults. If they see their mother or father taking aspirin, or other medicine, they may do the same thing. Taking medicine is better done out of sight of the children.

If your children have medicine to take, call pills or liquids by their names, advises Van Horn. Some parents try to make taking

medicine easier by saying that it "tastes good," or that it is "candy." But the child may believe this story so much that he'll come back later to swallow all of it.

When using a recipe that calls for oil and honey, molasses or anything sticky, measure the oil first and then the sticky stuff will slide right out of the measuring cup.

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