

Nutrition is Number One Pre-Game Strategy

NEWARK, DEL. — One young athlete indulges in a big steak dinner the night before the big game. A fellow competitor dines on spaghetti and a generous wedge of Italian bread.

Who picked the better pre-game meal?

The student who loaded up on carbohydrate-rich pasta and bread made the right choice, according to University of Delaware Coopera-

tive Extension home economics educator Mary Wilcoxon. Many people think that food high in protein — such as steak — helps an athlete sustain energy during competition. But studies have shown that carbohydrates are the best fuel for endurance because they are stored as glycogen in the body. Glycogen serves as the primary source during high-intensity exer-

cise, explains Wilcoxon.

"Student athletes tend to pick up nutrition myths from their peers," notes Wilcoxon. "For example, another common misconception is that muscle cramps are caused by inadequate salt intake. Thus, you sometimes see young athletes taking salt tablets."

Cramps are actually due to severe loss of water through sweat-

ing, says Wilcoxon. Drinking adequate amounts of water before, during and after exercise can prevent this water loss. Salt tablets are unnecessary, says Wilcoxon, and can even aggravate cramps by drawing more water out of the muscles and into the stomach. Normal salt intake during eating should replace the small amount of salt lost through sweating.

Other sports nutrition myths identified by Wilcoxon include:

- Drinking water during exercise causes an upset stomach and slows you down. There is no evidence that water taken during exercise causes an upset stomach or any other problem. In fact, consumption of water is very important because it helps replace body fluids lost as sweat. Drink 1 to 1½ cups water 15 minutes before exercise and ½ cup every 10 to 15 minutes during competition or practice.

- Eating a candy bar, honey or soft drink before exercising will provide a source of quick energy. Although sugar from these items will enter the body quickly, it can cause fatigue, hunger and dizziness. Large amounts of insulin are released to clear the blood of excess glucose, which causes a rapid drop in blood sugar. Better pre-game snack choices, eaten an hour or more before exercise, include bagels, crackers, eaten an hour or more before exercise, include bagels, crackers or half of a sandwich.

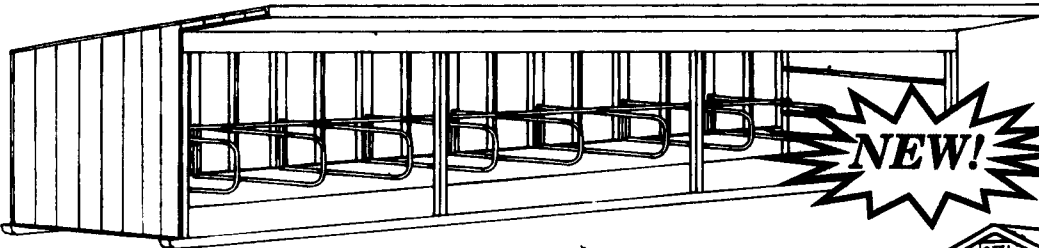
- Increased physical activity increases the need for vitamin and mineral supplements. Vitamin and mineral supplements are no substitute for the well-balanced diet. Excessive amounts of vitamin supplements over a prolonged period have proven harmful. It is true that potassium losses through perspiration and urine may be sufficient to decrease muscle performance and add to heat stress. Good sources of potassium are oranges, bananas, grapefruit and baked potatoes.

- Vitamins will give you more energy. No vitamin supplies energy. Although some vitamins are needed to produce energy from the foods you eat, these vitamins are easily supplied by an athlete's normal diet. Megadoses of vitamins won't give you more energy or improve your performance.

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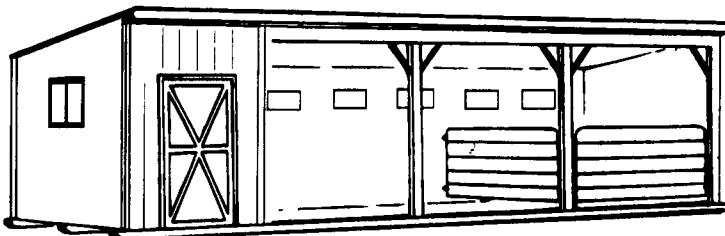
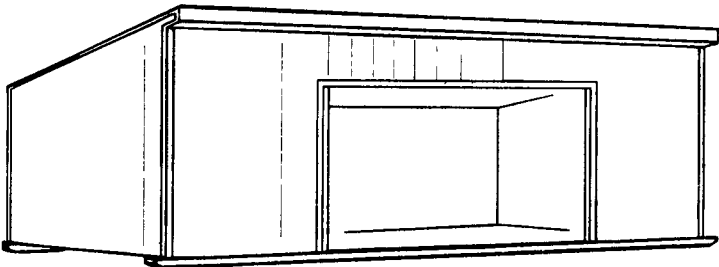
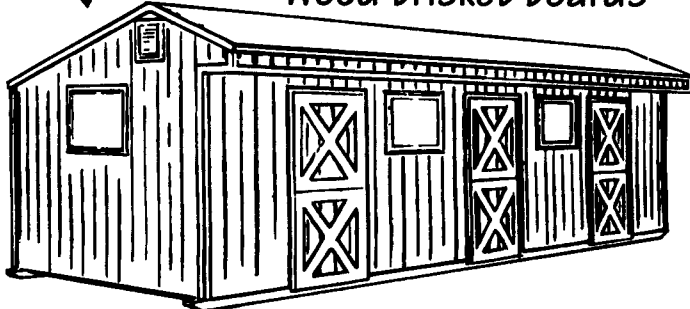
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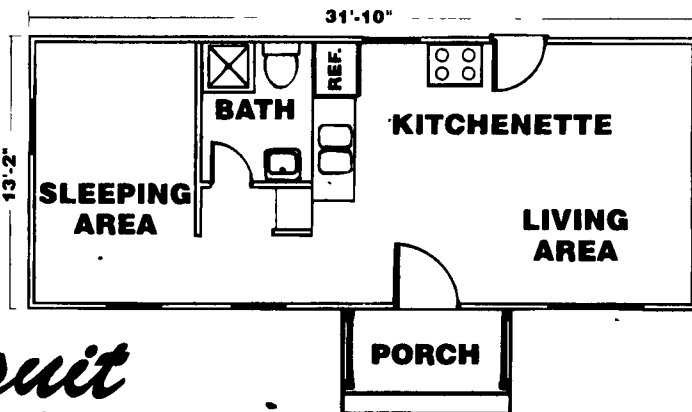
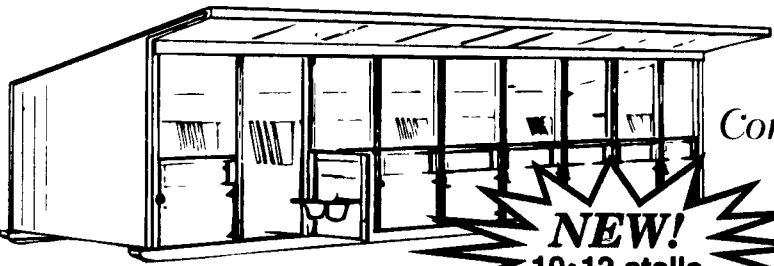
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