EDITORIAL

The 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP: Nutrition quite relevant here

At this time of the World Cup, now taking place in South Africa, we are being treated to some of the best built and clearly best nourished young men on the soccer pitch. This is the 19th FIFA World Cup, the ultimate international association football tournament which takes a whole month to conclude with a winner, a champion. The whole process, however, starts with a qualification process that spans over a period of 3 years. All this requires players to be healthy and to stay fit. As we observe their physique, it is possible to deduce these young men have been well fed, and that what they have on their body is more muscle than fat. The amount of running and physical exertion use up a lot of energy both immediate and stored. The bone structure of a player has to be strong and enduring.

Fat deposits burn up easily and leave the individual with little stamina to complete the grueling 90 minute play. Muscle is mostly protein, which takes a different pathway to convert to available glucose for immediate energy production. Good nutrition is important for everyone, but is crucial for sports men and women. When you eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water, the body produces enough energy to keep you in top form for winning performance. Most top athletes have a personal trainer who also provides nutrition advice; hopefully such advice is both factual and sound. Water is the most important nutrient for sports men and women; our bodies are made up of more than 60% water, which is essential for every body process and since the body can neither make water nor store it, it needs to be taken in regularly to replace what is lost through sweat, urine and use in various body functions.

Sports men and women need to drink water even in the absence of thirst. Tips that can help you stay hydrated are:

- sip small amounts of water regularly instead of gobbling down a whole lot at a go
- take cold beverages to keep body temperature stable and to minimize sweating
- weigh yourself regularly to ensure normal weight is maintained
- observe the color of your urine; the urine needs to be almost colorless as yellowish color is indicative of dehydration.

Maintaining normal body weight is crucial in sports. Putting on unwanted weight for whatever reason, and inadequate work-out do not help someone engaged in sports. We heard of some soccer players who were left out of their national teams for being “too fat”. That must be hard and such players need to be helped as putting on weight is a lot easier than taking it off. Each athlete needs to be aware of what is expected of him/her. Each athlete needs to be familiar with good and healthy dietary practices and have access to a well trained certified nutritionist.

Meantime, let us continue to keep nutrition in mind as we sit back enjoying the intrigues of soccer. After all, we have no idea when else the tournament will get back to the African continent.

By
Ruth Oniang'o
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Back to top
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