

Sprain or strain?

A nutritional approach

By Kelly Walker



Sports nutrition is fast becoming a hot topic. Despite this many sports enthusiasts are unaware that dietary alterations at the onset of injury can play a fundamental role in the road to recovery.

A sports injury can be disheartening and depending on the injury type the recovery period may be extensive. A reduced ability to train can lead to a drop in fitness levels and for some this can be devastating. Injuries come in many forms but two of the most common include sprains and strains.

Strains are injuries that affect muscles or tendons, thick bands that attach muscles to bones. They occur in response to a quick tear, twist, or pull of the muscle, which may be due to overstretching or over contraction. Pain, weakness, and muscle spasms are common symptoms experienced after a strain occurs.

Sprains are injuries that affect ligaments, thick bands of cartilage that attach bone to bone. They occur in response to a stretch or tear of a ligament and may occur from trauma such as a fall or outside force that displaces the surrounding joint from its normal alignment. Sprains can range from a mild stretch to a complete tear. Bruising, swelling, instability, and painful movement are common symptoms experienced after a sprain occurs.

When dealing with sports related injuries it is important to act as soon as possible. Initial treatment recommendations often include rest; ice application and Non- Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen. In the long-term, treatment options may include physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic treatment or massage.

These types of recommendations have become common but quite often dietary alterations are not considered. Diet plays a large role in the state of our health and many foods are known to have healing properties.

This can be attributed to nutrients such as anti-inflammatory essential fatty acids, found in oily fish. Anti-oxidants in brightly coloured fruits and vegetables aid the immune system and offer protection to body tissues.

Foods to increase for injury recovery:

VEGETABLES: Watercress, spinach, kale, olives, broccoli, carrots, courgettes, tomatoes, red and green peppers, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, onions, sweet potato, pumpkin

FRUITS: Avocado, apricots, melon, mango, citrus fruits, apples, strawberries, kiwi, blackcurrants, papaya, pineapple

NUTS AND SEEDS: Pecans, almonds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, linseed/flax seeds, sunflower seeds

WHOLEGRAINS: Brown rice, oats

MEATS: Liver, eggs, herring, tuna, mackerel, salmon, sardines, pilchards, trout

Some foods contain molecules that actively promote inflammation, such as saturated fats in red meat and dairy. Foods such as tea, coffee and alcohol can actually leach healing minerals from the body and prevent absorption of other vital nutrients.

Food to avoid during injury:

MEATS: Beef, lamb, pork, sausages, pate, bacon, salami, ham

PACKAGED FOODS: Processed ready meals, take-aways, fast food, fried foods, crisps, biscuits, confectionary, pastries,

DRINKS: Coffee, tea, alcohol, fizzy drinks

Foods to reduce during injury:

DAIRY: Milk, cream, ice cream, butter, cheese

WHOLEGRAINS: Wheat

Healing nutrients

	Tissue repair	Ligament formation	Anti-inflammatory	Pain relief
Vitamin A	✓		✓	
Vitamin C	✓	✓	✓	
Vitamin E	✓		✓	
Flavonoids	✓		✓	
Manganese	✓	✓		
Omega 3 EFA	✓		✓	✓
Curcumin			✓	✓
Glucosamine	✓	✓	✓	✓
MSM	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collagen	✓	✓		

For more guidance on the use of supplements it may be worthwhile seeking information from a Nutritional Therapist or Herbalist.

Kelly trained at the Institute for Optimum Nutrition and is a member of the British Association for Nutritional Therapists. She offers nutritional consultations locally and her special interests include sports nutrition, cancer, thyroid regulation and stress management. More information can be found at www.kwnutrition.net

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Great ways to increase the healing foods include fresh juices and smoothies such as the following:

Refreshing iced berry juice



Ingredients:

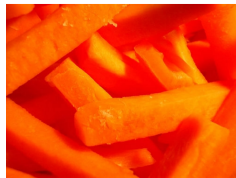
- 225g of mixed berries, such as strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries
- 300ml of apple juice
- Crushed ice.

Blend the berries and apple juice and mix in the crushed ice. Serve in a tall glass with a sprig of mint.

Carrot and apple juice

Ingredients:

- 2 large carrots
- 1 apple
- 1 cm cube of fresh ginger



Juice the apples, carrots and ginger and serve over ice.

During the winter anti-oxidant rich soups such as broccoli and sweetcorn, butternut squash and ginger and red pepper and tomato can be easy ways to increase the vital healing nutrients.

Supplementation of some nutrients and herbs has been shown to further reduce the recovery time following injury. Some of these supplemental nutrients have been shown to have a similar or greater effect than many of the common NSAID's.