



CHAMPIONING HOLISTIC ATHLETES

The New Face of Sports Medicine

by Marlaina Donato

From college athletics to Olympic training, sports medicine has a new, holistic face.

Coaches and athletes nationwide are attributing quicker recovery time, less inflammation and better focus to a whole body approach to health care. A nutrient-dense diet tailored to individual needs is at the

heart of overall fitness. Like Venus Williams and Tom Brady, tennis and football superstars who prefer raw vegan and organic whole foods, respectively, many of today's outstanding athletes choose to eat clean and

incorporate mind-body practices.

Telling Triumphs

Paralympic snowboard cross racer gold medalist, world champion and International Ski Federation para Nordic World Cup gold medalist Evan Strong, of Nevada City, California, was raised on an organic farm in Hawaii and continues to adopt many holistic practices. "I have a superfood smoothie every day. Liquid food helps me feel lighter and I have more usable energy for training," says Strong. His regimen also includes organic produce, sprouted grains, occasional raw goat milk products, homeopathic formulas and wildcrafted medicinal herbs.

Strong credits achieving his personal best to a healthy lifestyle and recovery from an automobile accident that led to amputation of his lower left leg as a teen. "After the accident, my family and I opened a raw vegetarian restaurant. We produced as many cultured foods as possible—sauerkraut, kombucha and kefir. Improving my gut health gave me the biggest strides in healing. Yoga and meditation also contributed. It all saved me."

Six-time Ironman triathlete, U.S. Senior Olympic gold medalist and marathoner Ruth Heidrich, Ph.D., of Honolulu, attributes surviving stage IV breast cancer primarily to her low-fat vegan diet. Already an avid runner and

nutritionally conscious, Heidrich was shocked to hear the diagnosis.

"I was 47 years old when I was told the results of the biopsy. I thought I was going to die because of the symptoms I was experiencing," recalls the 82-year-old, who not only beat multiple malignancies without chemotherapy or radiation, but was the first cancer patient to complete an Ironman Triathlon. This "Ironlady's" holistic approach includes a whole food, 100 percent plant-based diet, featuring oats, quinoa and brown rice. "When we give our body its proper fuel, it will function at its optimal level," remarks Heidrich, who has dedicated her life to re-educating others about diet and investing in her ongoing athletic achievements.

On the Road

Maintaining good habits while traveling can be challenging. Strong adds healthy salts to structure his drinking water and brings along superfoods such as green vegetable powders to use when he can't

access organic produce. To optimize his air quality while away from home, Strong uses a personalized air purifier that creates ozone.

San Francisco-based, three-time Olympic swimming gold medalist and world champion Natalie Coughlin remains dedicated to better diet choices without deprivation. "When I travel, I always bring my own snacks. I like dark chocolate-covered almonds, a natural sweet that also supplies protein and fiber. To stay hydrated, I drink herbal teas, especially mint," says Coughlin, who also incorporates a tart green smoothie every morning with kale, parsley, collards, celery, citrus and frozen pineapple.

At home, "I like to be informed about where my meat comes from and how the conditions are for the animal. If I roast a chicken, I will use every part, including the bones, to make a stock," she says. Her holistic approach includes a consistent yoga regimen, meditation and application of essential oils.

High Expectations

Even under the best of circumstances, professional athletes encounter difficulties, but when faced with enormous obstacles, the best can get even better. "I've faced injuries and illness during pivotal times in my life and career, but I always approached it with the intention to be proactive, rather than being reactive," advises Coughlin.

For Strong, confronting tragedy with the right attitude offers possibility. "Thirteen years ago, I was hit by a car and lost my leg, but now I see that moment as a blessing instead of a curse. It was a hardship that tested my limits, but in the end, it propelled me to achieving dreams I didn't even know I had."

Nearly four decades after her grim diagnosis, Heidrich embodies hope for all of us when she says, "It is never too late to adopt a better way."

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