Nutrition for Strength, Muscle, and Health: A Practical Nutrition Guide for Women

DR. MED. SHEN ZHONG
MOVE · CREATE · EVOLVE

ABSTRACT— Between the ages of 18 and 35, women experience a period of *high physiological adaptability*: muscle protein synthesis is responsive, recovery capacity is strong, and training stimuli translate efficiently into strength and muscle gains. The goal is to fuel training, support hormones, and build resilient strength. The recommendations below are grounded in the latest resistance-training and sports-nutrition research findings.

I. ENERGY AVAILABILITY: THE FOUNDATION OF PROGRESS

Muscle growth and strength adaptation require sufficient energy availability. While short fat-loss phases can be useful, chronic under-eating is one of the most common reasons women fail to progress in strength training.

Research consistently shows that resistance training combined with adequate caloric intake leads to superior gains in lean mass and performance. If training quality, recovery, or mood is declining, energy intake—not motivation—is usually the limiting factor.

II. PROTEIN: THE CORNERSTONE OF MUSCLE GROWTH

A. Total daily intake:

1.6-2.2 g of protein per kg of body weight per day. Higher: >3g/kg/day is shown to help maintain. Protein is the primary nutritional driver of muscle repair and growth. Studies found that a high-protein diet combined with resistance training may contribute to positive body composition and lean body mass gain.[1-4]

B. Distribution matters:

Protein is best utilized when spread across the day rather than concentrated in one meal. A practical, evidence-based approach is: 3-5 meals per day, each meal providing 20-40 g of high-quality protein.[2]

C. Reliable sources:

Eggs, fish, poultry, lean meat, tofu, and whey protein. Supplements are tools, not requirements. Note: Consistency over weeks and months matters far more than perfect timing.

III. CARBOHYDRATES: FUEL TRAINING AND ADAPTATION

Practical range for active women:

- On regular training days: ~5-8 g/kg/day (e.g., if you weigh 60 kg, ~300–480 g/day)
- Higher: ~7–12 g/kg/day when training volume/duration is very high.[5]

Carbohydrates are the primary fuel for muscles and are the preferred for moderate- to high-intensity exercise as they maintain muscle glycogen and blood glucose levels, enabling sustained effort to improve training quality.[6-8]

A. Daily intake:

Daily totals should be adjusted by training load, body size, and goals (strength-focused vs. endurance-focused), but the foundational idea is to *fill and maintain muscle glycogen stores* so training is not limited by fuel.

B. Carbohydrate Timing Around Training:

Although muscle glycogen replenishment can take 24–48 hours[9], carbohydrates eaten before and during training serve a different, immediate purpose: they stabilize blood glucose and liver glycogen to fuel the nervous system, reduce reliance on stress hormones, and preserve neural drive, coordination, and high-threshold motor-unit recruitment during hard training. For women—who are more sensitive to low energy availability and stress-hormone spikes—this real-time carbohydrate availability is critical to maintain training quality, sustain volume and intensity, protect hormonal balance, and ultimately translate resistance training into consistent strength and muscle gains.

Before Training: For sessions ~30–60 minutes, carbohydrate ingestion right before or as a small snack/solution may enhance performance or at least maintain energy. If training is longer or intense, a more substantial pre-workout meal earlier in the day helps top off glycogen stores. Practical suggestion: Eat carbohydrate (complex or moderate glycemic index) 1–3 hours before training (e.g., rice, oats, potatoes, fruit). If the session starts soon (<60 min after eating), choose easily digestible carbs (e.g., a banana, toast, sports drink).

During Training: For exercise lasting ~1 hour or less, carbohydrate ingestion is not strictly necessary, but even small amounts or a carbohydrate "mouth rinse" can improve performance. For longer sessions (>60 min), research shows carbohydrate intake during the activity improves performance and delays fatigue. Typical recommendations for during training: ~30–60 g of carbs per hour, increasing toward ~60–90 g/h when sessions are long/intense and gut tolerance is trained.

After Training: Carbohydrates post-exercise help replenish glycogen, especially when another session follows soon. Combining carbs with protein immediately or within ~1–2 hours supports both glycogen repletion and muscle protein synthesis.

C. Reliable sources:

Rice, potatoes, oats, bread around workouts, and fruit post-training.

IV. DIETARY FAT: HORMONAL AND SYSTEMIC HEALTH

A. Daily intake:

Aim for 20–30% of total calories from fat. Fat consumed should be primarily unsaturated fatty acids, with no more than 10% of total energy intake coming from saturated fatty acids and no more than 1% of total energy intake coming from *trans*-fatty acids. Dietary fat not only plays a crucial role in estrogen production, nervous system function, and long-term health, but also can be beneficial for muscle mass and strength.[10]

B. Reliable sources:

olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocado, egg yolks, and fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, Herring, Trout and etc.)[11]

V. THE ATOP STUDIO PERSPECTIVE

The most **effective** nutrition plan is the one you can follow without constant stress. A sustainable structure:

- 3 main meals + 1–2 protein-focused snacks
- Protein at every meal
- Carbs centered around training
- Flexibility built into social life

Dr. med. Shen Zhong

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