

A Lot on Your Plate?

While you might be time poor, with a bit of forethought and the right preparation, you need never forsake a nutritious home-cooked meal again, writes triathlete, nutritionist and new mum, Pip Taylor.

Words: Pip Taylor | Images: Thinkstock

In April, my husband and I welcomed our first child – a little girl – into the world. It's been an amazing and rewarding experience, but has meant I've had to put my career as a professional athlete on hold for a while. But I'm now back into full training and have my sights firmly set on getting back to top form and on a start line very soon. While I'm relishing training again, the new addition to the family means I have to be much smarter with how I manage my time. But this does not mean cutting corners when it comes to good nutrition. As a professional athlete, who relies on the performance of their body – and now as a new mum responsible for the nutrition to maintain the growth and development of a whole new life – it is vital that I maximise my nutrient intake and eat as well as I can. But eating well isn't just important for new mums or professional athletes. The right nutrition is the foundation of good health for everyone – without it you cannot train or race to your potential, your immunity is compromised, and recovery, mood and future health can all suffer.

The best way to know and be in control of what you are eating is to make it yourself.

Every triathlete I know is time poor – juggling family, work and training means that kitchen time can be an afterthought, and reliance on packaged sports foods can become a daily occurrence. But eating well needs to be a priority no matter how little time you have. Since the birth of our little girl (apart from a few meals cooked by visiting family members) I have made every meal – and I say this simply to make the point that cooking and eating well does not have to be a chore nor is 'I just don't have time' a valid excuse for poor food choices. It is actually not only possible but easy to make the right food choices with just a few tricks and a little know-how.

Real whole foods are going to go a long way towards helping any athlete reach their potential



Pip's top time saving tips

1. Skip the supermarket: Make use of home delivery services for fresh fruit and veg and groceries. In many areas of the country you can get fresh local and even organic fruits and veg delivered straight to your door. The major supermarkets also do home delivery. **Athlete Bonus:** Staying away from crowds after a hard workout when immunity is lower will help you avoid getting sick.

2. Plan ahead: You don't need to do a complicated weekly meal plan (I never have), but thinking ahead a little in terms of when your really busy days are; when you might have a little extra time; when the shops are open, and so on, makes things easier. Thinking ahead can be as simple as boiling extra eggs as snacks or breakfast, roasting trays of vegetables to be incorporated into meals, or using a spare half hour on the weekend to prepare one night's dinner for the week.

3. Make leftovers do double duty: If you are time poor, never cook a meal as a one off – cooking extra means there is always a second dinner, lunch, breakfast or post-workout snack ready to go without relying on takeout or packaged foods.

4. Cheat smart: Make use of things like pre-washed salad mixes, chopped and/or frozen vegetables and your microwave – these can be huge time savers in the kitchen and don't compromise on nutrients.

5. Invest in some containers and a small Esky. Some foods can be easily packed into small plastic baggies and thrown into the back of cycle jerseys, but for packing lunches to take to work or for post-swim snacks, the ability to store foods safely and easily is essential. It also means that they can be packed the night before or directly from leftover dinners, saving crucial morning time for other things like training.

and maintain health and vitality. The best way to know and be in control of what you are eating is to make it yourself. Nothing needs to be fancy and you really only need to master a few basics to become proficient in the kitchen. Don't make food or nutrition complicated – it really doesn't need to be – but do think of time in the kitchen as a time investment in both sports performance and your health.

I believe the absolute key to eating well is shopping well. This involves having a stocked fridge and pantry from which meals can be produced without the need for last minute or special shopping for each meal. This also prevents impulse eating, which can undermine an otherwise healthy diet. If you keep your fridge stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables, herbs, eggs, yogurt and other protein-rich foods and your pantry stocked with rice, sweet potatoes, potatoes, oils, spices and nut butters,

nutritious meals and snacks are never more than a few minutes away – hardly any more time than cracking open another bar or premixed shake.

Optimising recovery means meals and/or snacks should ideally be consumed within 30 minutes of a hard workout. For triathletes in particular, who usually complete multiple workouts in a day, paying attention to recovery is crucial. Aim to eat something containing both protein and carbohydrate to replenish muscle glycogen, repair muscle damage and optimise uptake. But rather than rely on packaged bars and 'sports foods', go for real, whole foods, which not only meet recovery and fuelling goals but also provide more in the way of essential nutrients. Foods like chicken and rice, sweet potatoes and grilled steak, and apple slices with a spoonful of nut butter are all good choices. For both recovery and early-morning fuelling, having leftovers in the fridge is a great idea.

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Chicken Hot Pot

PIP'S TIP

Hot pots, stews and curries are fantastic time savers in the kitchen.

As with this recipe, there is often a little prep followed by a longer cooking time that you can use to squeeze in another workout or finish off any of those other tasks. Stews also make fantastic leftovers and freeze well - so make sure you cook more than enough for a few meals at a time.

Ingredients

- 1 red onion, sliced
- 1 tbsp crushed garlic
- 1 tsp crushed ginger
- 4 baby corn, sliced
- 1/4 cup red capsicum, sliced
- 4 button mushrooms, cut into quarters
- 1/2 cup green beans, diced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 4 chicken drumsticks, skin off
- 1 diced tomato
- 1 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped
- 1 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1tbsp corn flour
- 1/2 cup chicken stock

Method

Heat a saucepan on moderate heat and add oil. Coat each drumstick with the corn flour and then

brown on all sides for about 30 seconds. Remove from the pan and place in an oven-proof dish with a lid.

Add onion and garlic in the same saucepan and cook until transparent. Add the remaining vegetables along with the oyster sauce and chicken stock and cook for two minutes. Place all the saucepan ingredients into the oven-proof dish covering the chicken drumsticks. Place the oven proof dish in a 180°C pre-heated oven and cook for 60 minutes.

Once cooked, remove from the oven and top with chopped coriander and serve with rice or cous cous.

SERVES 4

RECIPES

