

BEST FOODS TO EAT FOR MUSCLE RECOVERY

Have you been putting in the work in the gym for months on end, but are not seeing your desired results?

Chances are that although your exercise programme is sound, you might be lacking in the nutrition/recovery department and this could be holding you back.

If you want to build muscle and obtain your fitness goals, getting the right fuel after a workout is just as important as exercise itself.

We're not talking about eating chicken, broccoli and brown rice every day (although you could, but it might get repetitive after a while), we're talking about getting some real science-backed foods in your diet which tend to get missed off.

Below are a few foods which get little to no appreciation but pack a mean punch when it comes to muscle recovery.


PHOTO CREDITS: ISTOCK

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Eggs

Eggs are an excellent source of protein and contain all nine essential amino acids for muscle repair and growth.

It is especially rich in the amino acid leucine which is a key component used for protein synthesis and many other metabolic functions within the body.

With that said, not only are eggs rich in protein, they're also a good source of healthy fats and a great food to eat for muscle recovery as, from a nutritional perspective, they contain other key vitamins and minerals including B-complex vitamins, vitamin A, D and choline for optimal health.

You can boil some eggs and keep them refrigerated for a quick post-workout meal or make an omelette with spinach for a quick boost.



Shellfish

Shellfish such as oysters, crab, mussels and shrimp are not only good sources of protein but are naturally high in the mineral zinc.

Zinc is used in many processes within the body, such as repairing damaged muscle tissue, maintaining normal immune function, protein synthesis and growth and development. It's also used for the functioning of over 300 enzymes.

Although more research needs to be done, one study showed that supplementing with zinc and magnesium increases anabolic hormonal profile, muscle function and strength.

Whilst inconclusive, it is well known that deficiency in zinc can lead to chronic fatigue and impair recovery due to its natural anti-inflammatory properties which can decrease oxidative stress within the body.

It is recommended that men get 11mg of zinc and women get 8mg per day.

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Olive oil

Going back as far as the ancient Greek Olympics, olive oil has been a staple ingredient in the Mediterranean culture for centuries and for good reason.

With olive oil extracted from pressing whole olives (which in itself is a fruit), olive oil appears to improve inflammatory markers and reduce oxidative stress in individuals with rheumatoid arthritis.

This is likely due to olive oil's high antioxidant profile and rich monounsaturated fat content which is made up of oleic acid. It also contains good amounts of vitamins E and K.

Not only this, olive oil seems particularly beneficial when combined with oily fish which are naturally high in anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids.

An example would be drizzling a generous amount of olive oil on a salmon fillet.

One study showed that the combination of the two improved grip strength, soreness in the morning and joint pain.

Finally, consuming healthy fats such as olive oil has



been shown to improve men's reproductive health and boost serum testosterone levels. For men in particular, high testosterone levels helps aid the muscle building process and ensures your body recovers faster after a gruelling workout.

Nevertheless, if you're looking at adding olive oil into your diet, be sure to opt for the 'extra virgin' variety as it tends to be less processed than its standalone olive oil counterpart.



Oily Fish

Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, anchovies and sardines are a great choice for building muscle and maintaining your overall health. What's more, oils from these fish have seven

times as much omega-3 compared to omega-6.

One study carried out by Urmia University showed that consuming omega-3 was effective in reducing DOMS (Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness) in the test subjects (untrained men) which was induced by exercise between a 24 - 48 hour period.

Omega-3 has also been shown to reduce inflammation in the body and reduce the risk of osteoporosis and joint pain through arthritis.

After a gym session lifting heavy weights, it's crucial to ensure you're intaking a lot of omega-3 to keep your joints lubricated and healthy.

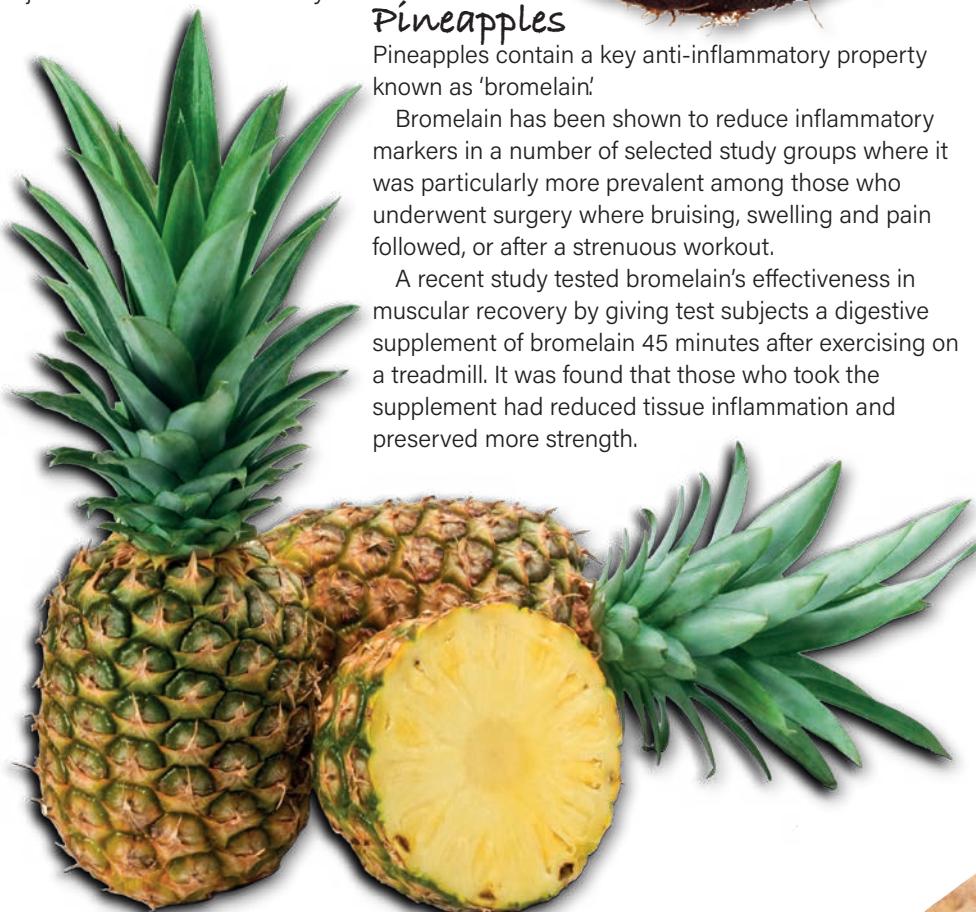


Pineapples

Pineapples contain a key anti-inflammatory property known as 'bromelain'.

Bromelain has been shown to reduce inflammatory markers in a number of selected study groups where it was particularly more prevalent among those who underwent surgery where bruising, swelling and pain followed, or after a strenuous workout.

A recent study tested bromelain's effectiveness in muscular recovery by giving test subjects a digestive supplement of bromelain 45 minutes after exercising on a treadmill. It was found that those who took the supplement had reduced tissue inflammation and preserved more strength.



Ginger

Ginger has been shown to be helpful in easing muscular pain following exercise.

One study showed that consuming 2 grams of either raw or heated ginger for 11 consecutive days considerably reduced muscle soreness in people performing single-joint eccentric exercise.

Although ginger might not have an effect right away, another study suggested it may be effective at reducing progressive muscle aches over the course of a few days. This is most likely down to ginger's natural anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidation properties, due to its high gingerol content.

You can ensure you're getting enough ginger by including a few shavings with lemon in a hot tea or adding it into your meals.



Coconut Water

Often hailed as 'nature's sports drink', coconut water is a complete fluid and can help restore hydration and replenish electrolytes that are lost whilst exercising through sweat.

Electrolytes are minerals made up of sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium and other properties that carry electrical charges around the body which are responsible for stimulating muscle function and supporting a healthy nervous system.

An absence of these minerals can lead to fatigue, cramps and dehydration which can affect your recovery and performance.

Two studies have shown that drinking coconut water was able to restore the body's hydration level better than water and equal to sports beverages. This is coupled with the fact that it is also fairly low in calories and carbohydrates.

Before you ditch your usual Lucozade Sport, be sure to read the label/ ingredients list of your chosen coconut water to ensure you're getting 100% coconut water (which isn't from concentrate).

Some brands will often add sugars/flavourings which will reduce its effectiveness.

Putting it all together

So, there you have it. A few foods which tend to not get the recognition they deserve to get you back through those gym doors a lot quicker.

As always, a varied diet will ensure you cover all of your bases from a nutritional perspective however adding in the likes of eggs, shellfish, olive oil, oily fish, pineapples, ginger and coconut water will give you the assurance that your body will put the nutrients found in these foods to good use, and keep your body in prime condition. M&F