



FIGHTERS DIET



The importance of a good diet. For boxers, as with any sport, a good diet is a crucial part of staying in shape and keeping up with the demands of the training regime. Boxers need to eat well in order to maintain muscle strength and energy in the ring and avoid feeling tired and sluggish part way through a fight. Boxers use punches, jabs, speed and flexibility requiring strength, endurance and energy to defeat their opponent. As a result, they require a nutritious diet which will provide high levels of energy to last throughout the duration of a fight.

Unlike most other sports, whilst a boxer needs muscle and power behind them, they are conditioned by the weight restrictions of their weight class. Boxers seek to be at the top end of their weight boundaries to maximise strength and energy, so it is crucial that they have the right diet to ensure they have enough energy to undertake fights and intensive training sessions, whilst staying within the limitations of their weight class. Most boxers aim to stay within 3-5 % of their ideal fighting weight during their training in order to avoid having to lose weight drastically as a fight approaches, as dramatic crash diets before a fight can result in reduced levels of performance.

What to eat

A boxer's diet should be drawn up according to the recommended ratios of particular foodstuffs. Carbohydrates, proteins and fats are all crucial for providing the energy and nutrition a boxer needs.

Carbohydrates – boxing is an anaerobic activity which requires professional boxers to maintain high energy levels for fifteen intensive 3-minute rounds. A boxer's intention should be to eat foods which will provide the correct strength, power and weight ratio which is best maintained by sources of high energy and low fat content. For this reason carbohydrates are the ideal foodstuff for boxers, slowly releasing energy for a sustained period of time, replacing lost glycogen stores and increasing stamina during fights and training. Some carbohydrates, particularly processed carbohydrates which are derived from white flour, such as white bread and pasta, contain calories that are less useful, given their low nutritional value.

Instead boxers should eat natural carbohydrates such as yams, beans, whole-wheat grain, fruits and oatmeal, which are packed full of useful nutrients. Because carbohydrates are such effective sources of energy, boxers should eat more of them than any other foodstuff. Dieticians recommend that 45 – 55 percent of a boxer's diet should be made up of carbohydrates. For example, out of a daily diet that consists of 4000 calories, 1800 to 2200 calories of those should be derived from carbohydrates, roughly equating to 550 grams in weight.

Protein – boxers often experience small tears in their muscles after a fight, causing them to feel tired and sore, so it is crucial that enough protein is included in their daily diet. Protein works to repair muscles and increase muscle growth, preventing long lasting damage but it also acts as a further energy source, preventing the body from using its much-valued muscle for energy.

Chicken, tuna, eggs and lean beef are all good sources of protein as are protein drinks (such as 'Accelerade' or 'Rapid Recovery') although these should only be taken by those engaged in a serious and intensive training routine. For concentrated muscle increase, boxers should consume a protein drink during training sessions and another shake immediately after training. Dieticians recommend that protein should make up 30 to 40 percent of the boxer's daily diet. healthy supplements which are purified of the contaminants often found in fish.

Fats – whilst excessive fat consumption can cause unwanted weight gain and should be avoided, boxers do need some fats to maintain important internal bodily functions. Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats, also known as essential fats or fatty acids, are both needed for the production of prostaglandins, a type of hormone which keeps the body in working order. Seafood or walnuts are ideal sources of omega fat or alternatively flaxseed oil and cod liver oil can be taken as The body also needs mono unsaturated fats which are found in food such as olives, seeds and avocado. Dieticians recommend that boxers should ensure that 15 percent of their daily diet is made up of essential and mono unsaturated fats. Good fats absorb certain vitamins essential for a healthy body, so keeping fat intake to lower than 15 percent is likely only to have a harmful effect.

Water – water is essential for staying healthy and energised, particularly in a strenuous sport such as boxing where it is easy to become dehydrated. Boxers should ensure that 8 – 10 glasses of water are included in their daily diet, increasing their water consumption during a fight.

What not to eat

The following foods are all high in fat and sugar content and although they may provide the boxer with high bursts of energy, they are short-lasting energy sources and will cause the boxer to feel tired, sluggish and to put on unwanted weight. For this reason they should be avoided as far as possible:

- Fried foods
- Fast food/ takeaways
- Food high in sugar e.g. sweets and fizzy drinks
- Saturated fat
- Processed food
- Off-season diets

During the period when a boxer is not fighting or in pre-fight training, their diet will need to change slightly to accommodate the less intensive training schedule. Dieticians usually recommend that, during the off-season period, boxers should maintain a daily ratio of 60 percent carbohydrates, 20 percent protein and 20 percent fat.

Pre-fight diet

The food a boxer eats just before they fight, is crucial for their performance in the ring. In order to delay feelings of tiredness during a fight, boxers must eat food that will provide energy, be easily digested and maintain blood sugar levels during the fight. Dieticians recommend that boxers eat increasingly smaller meals as a fight gets closer, sticking to lighter starchy foods such as brown bread sandwiches, fruit and cereals. Most vegetables, beans and bulky fruits should be avoided as these can cause diarrhoea, particularly when the boxer is nervous, and similarly cabbage and dry beans can be bad given their gas-forming potential. Boxers should never eat new foods just before a fight, to avoid the risk of a bad reaction. They should drink 400 – 600 ml of water, two or three hours before the fight, to maintain hydration although drinking too much just before a ring could have an adverse reaction.

Post-fight diet

The main intent of a post-fight diet is to help the body recover from a fight as effectively as possible, by restoring glycogen levels, preventing the body from consuming its own muscle mass for energy. Immediately after a fight, the boxer should eat food which is high in protein and carbohydrates and low in fibre and consume low fibrous drinks, eating a similar meal every two hours for the following two hours. The recovery meal is even more effective if it is liquidized, aiding digestion. The combination of protein and carbohydrates aids the repair of muscle tissue, speeding up the period of recovery before a boxer can return to intensive training. Once six hours have passed after the fight, the boxer should return to their ordinary diet.

General Dietary tips

Do:

Eat five or six meals every day

Space meals out at regular intervals: dieticians recommend that boxers eat every three or four hours to keep insulin to the optimum level.

Eat as much nutritional food as possible: food such as fruit, vegetables, brown rice and pasta contains lots of useful vitamins, minerals and fibre which allow the body to function as effectively as possible.

Dieticians recommend that 25 to 35 grams of a boxer's daily intake should be classified as high fibre.

Eat plenty of starchy food such as whole-grain cereal, wheat pasta and yams to maintain optimum health and energy levels.

Ensure consumption of recommended amount of healthy fat and take supplements if necessary.

Eat a good variety of foods to ensure the body gets as many nutrients as possible, whilst maintaining the correct ratio of carbohydrates, protein and fat.

Take multi-vitamins regularly to ensure the body is receiving all necessary vitamins for maximum performance.

Eat a light snack before bed, such as a piece of wholemeal toast but avoid eating too much as sleep may be inhibited.

Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

Don't:

Eat carbohydrates before bed as the body will not burn them off whilst sleeping.

Have good days and bad days: boxers should be in good health leading up to fights and between fights to maximise training potential and performance in a fight. Binge eating and crash diets should be avoided at all times as these will effect health and cause poor weight control.

Eat sugary substances such as chocolate, sweets and cakes as these will have a negative effect on the body's performance.

Don't drink sugary water-based drinks such as carbonated drinks or cordials.

