



## **Sailing Fitness, The Holistic Approach**

**Meka Taulbee**

The sport of sailing doesn't come without its toll on the body. As with any activity if you want a long lasting career you need a fine tuned machine. Everyone puts a lot of prep work into their boats but often forget to do the same for their body. We have all read about how stretching and strength training can prevent injuries but I'd like to take a more holistic approach by showing how nutrition affects performance and may increase/decrease injury.

Our muscles should be soft and pliable. When they don't get proper hydration and nutrition they become brittle and are more apt to pull, tear and strain. This is not only true for our muscles but for all of our organs. If our organs and muscles are not working properly, it will cause the rest of our body to try to compensate. This can show up in the form of back pain, knee injury and muscle soreness leading to poor race performance and a lack of mental clarity. Preventing this is as simple as watching what we put into our bodies. There are many aspects to this line of thought but I am going to focus on just a few for now.

The first is what you drink. The body is made up of between 65-75% water. If you are dehydrated you need to replenish the liquids in your body. If you are losing water and salt through perspiration why would you replace it with sugar and food dye? By drinking most of the sport drinks that are on the market that's what you are doing. I know that the body has to put out a tremendous amount of energy while sailing, especially in windy conditions. If we are fueling our bodies with manufactured ingredients it is hard for the body to break them down and this takes away from our usable energy for our performance. Instead, try using plain water or coconut water. Coconut water is a natural electrolyte replacer. If you add lemon or ginger it will be an inflammatory reducing, antibacterial energy drink.

Did you know that one of the largest contributors to injury and lack of mental focus is refined sugar? Refined sugar moves quickly through the bloodstream jolting the pancreas and stressing the adrenal glands. This causes the formation of acid which eats up the bodies minerals and pulls calcium from the bones. This can lead to such conditions as arthritis and increased fatigue. These are two things that are not cohesive with sailing. Many energy/protein bars are laden with more sugar than substance. This also

includes our daily foods while we are not racing. Watch the sugar content and you will greatly reduce those all too common back aches.

I feel that the consumption of gluten is doing athletes a big disservice. Gluten is an elastic, sticky protein found in foods such as wheat, rye and barley. It can also be found in pasta, beer and medications. Gluten causes inflammation in the digestive system as well as the body as a whole. It causes damage in the small intestine which in turn hinders the absorption of nutrients from the foods we eat. Gluten can cause such symptoms as fatigue, numbness in the hands and feet and muscle and joint pain. In sailing these symptoms can be detrimental to our performance.

Lastly, some foods that we commonly eat are hard for the body to breakdown and/or have some negative effects for someone that is working toward being in top athletic condition. One of the biggest offenders I see on the race course is bananas. Bananas are usually eaten to help replace potassium and prevent cramping. However banana's increase moisture in the body and can increase phlegm. If you are fighting or have a cold your body is weak and you don't want to make it weaker. Instead try an avocado. They have 35% more potassium than a banana. They are also higher in fiber. The second largest offender I see is meat. All too often I hear sailors say "it's going to be windy, I'm going to eat a big steak" Per 100 calories broccoli has 11.1 grams of protein as opposed to steak which has 6.5 grams of protein. Broccoli is also high in Vitamin C, Iron and B vitamins and is much easier for the body to digest than steak. Eating foods that are hard for the body to digest force it to focus on only breaking down the food and leaves the other parts of the body weak and more prone to injury. Maybe a big salad with a side of steamed broccoli on those windy days is a better way to fuel up and stay strong.

In order to best prevent injury you need to keep your body running like a well oiled machine. Stretching, proper hydration, reducing sugar, eating gluten free and plant based foods will greatly reduce your risk of injury and boost your performance.

*Meka is an Holistic Health and Fitness Consultant. She is an ACE certified Personal Trainer, a Certified Holistic Nutritionist and a Certified Sports Nutrition Consultant.. She has been training Laser sailors for over 12 years. To learn more visit Meka at [sailfit.com](http://sailfit.com).*