MYTH: Athletes should not eat carbohydrate, specifically sugars, shortly before exercise because it might cause blood sugar to spike and crash, hurting performance.

FACT: While some athletes who eat carbohydrate shortly before exercise may experience a rise in blood sugar followed by a “dip” after the onset of exercise, most do not feel an impact and research shows overall performance is not impaired. In fact, carbohydrate consumed within about an hour prior to exercise behaves the same metabolically as that consumed during exercise, and essentially begins during exercise fueling. This behavior may be especially important for athletes who do not have the opportunity to eat additional carbohydrate during exercise.¹

MYTH: A large serving of protein will improve my muscle recovery after exercise.

FACT: When it comes to protein, more isn’t better. Research shows that a small amount of high-quality protein (10-20 g) will stimulate muscle protein synthesis. Researchers have found that intakes greater than about 20 g of protein provide little or no further stimulus for muscle protein synthesis after exercise. Consuming more dietary protein will result in the protein being used as fuel instead of muscle building.²

MYTH: Athletes lose only water when they sweat.

FACT: If that were true, sweat wouldn’t taste salty and athletes in the heat probably wouldn’t cramp so often. Sweat contains mainly sodium (salt) and chloride but also other electrolytes (minerals) like potassium and magnesium. As sodium is lost through sweat, the body’s supply is diminished and with large losses muscles are more likely to cramp up.³ Sports drinks help keep the body hydrated because they contain electrolytes, particularly sodium, that help retain fluid and replenish what’s lost in sweat.⁴ Water does not.

MYTH: Potassium is the most critical electrolyte.

FACT: Not true. Sodium is the primary electrolyte required before, during and following sweaty exercise.⁵ In fact, it’s possible for some athletes to lose more than 10 g of salt in just one day of hard training. Drinking a sports drink with sodium is important, because sodium helps maintain the physiological desire to drink, enhances fluid absorption and promotes fluid balance.⁵

References: