



Dr. Dora Meyer

Nutrition for Dancers

Handout

1. What is a healthy diet?

A balanced meal is like a plate.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ of that plate should be filled with a variety of vegetables like broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, and greens.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate should be protein, which could include chicken, beef, fish, eggs, or a plant protein like tofu or beans.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate should be grains and starches, including rice, potatoes, pasta or bread.

Dancers should aim to eat 3 meals and 2 snacks per day. Generally, a dancer should be eating every 3-4 hours. A snack should be a combination of a protein food and a carbohydrate.

2. What should you eat in a day?

	How much?	Examples
Grains and starches	$\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate	Whole grain bread, pasta, crackers, oats, barley, quinoa
Calcium foods	3 portions per day	Yogurt, cottage cheese, milk, calcium fortified plant milk, cheese, dark green veggies, such as broccoli and kale
Fruit	2-3 portions per day	A variety of fresh, frozen and dried
Vegetables	$\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate	A variety of colors, fresh, frozen, cooked, or canned
Protein foods	$\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate	Eggs, beans, lentils, chickpeas, lean meat, such as chicken and turkey, fish, tofu, seitan, nut butter and nuts
Fats and oils	2-3 "thumb sized" portions	Olive oil, rapeseed oil, avocados

Recovery foods to help with muscle recovery and regeneration.



3. Before training:

Eat a small meal with both protein and carbs about two hours before training. Examples are:

- Hummus with whole grain crackers
- Nut butter (like peanut or almond butter) on brown bread with a banana
- A handful of dried fruits and nuts

4. After training:

Eat a small snack about an hour after training. You want to focus on healthy carbs and protein. Examples are:

- A piece of cheese or peanut butter with crackers
- An apple or pear with a handful of nuts
- Yogurt with seeds or nuts and dried fruits
- Avocado toast with pumpkin seeds

5. Before bed

Dairy foods, such as yogurt, cottage cheese, or quark, has been shown in studies to improve muscle protein synthesis overnight. Aim for a small snack, such as a cup of Greek yogurt, an hour or two before going to bed.

6. Keep hydrated!

Drink at least 3 liters of water per day. Sports drinks can be helpful during training, especially if you don't have time to eat. A sports drink can restore fluid and increase your blood glucose levels. You can make your own sports drink. Add 1/3 pure juice, 2/3 water and a small pinch of salt to a 1 liter bottle.

7. Special micronutrients

These micronutrients deserve special attention:

- Vitamin D is essential for good bone health and absorption of calcium. Dancers need strong bones to avoid breaks and injuries. Your body makes vitamin D from the sun and it is hard to get enough vitamin D through foods. It is a good idea to take a daily Vitamin D supplement especially in the winter months (October-March)
- Calcium is similarly important for bone strength and can be found in dairy products and soy products, such as tofu. It is also high in certain vegetables, like broccoli and spinach. If you drink plant milk, make sure it is calcium fortified.
- Iron is necessary for delivering oxygen throughout the body, an essential part of energy production. Active female dancers need more iron. Meat, eggs, and dark leafy greens are rich in iron. Ask your doctor to check your blood levels before taking iron supplements.



8. What about protein powder?

Most dancers can take in all of the protein they need by eating foods from the protein group at each meal (see the table above). An exception could be if you are vegan or have had a bone fracture. If you decide to take a protein supplement do not consume more than 30 g per day. Whey or soy isolate are the best options.

- Creatin is a combination of 3 amino acids. This supplement can be helpful for muscle repair and muscle protein synthesis. If you decide to take creatine you should aim for 3-5 grams before training per day.