

Health and Nutrition Article

The following article was written in the Royal Academy of Dance Gazette Magazine.

Want to stay slim and strong?
Simone Parkinson has the solution

The Nutritionist

Ah, the age-old debate that many dancers and even the general public struggle with: how to stay lean, have the body fat you want but not to sacrifice your overall health. As complex as this debate has become over the years, with fad diets constantly rearing their ugly heads, the solution is not as difficult as the media has made out. The body, although very complex, does not require a complex dietary system to enable it to reach peak condition and performance.

The key to “having it all” rests with your blood sugar levels. If you learn how to keep your blood sugar levels balanced not only will you have the body fat you desire but you will also have high energy, feel mentally and emotionally strong, your immune system will work effectively and your sleep patterns will be more balanced, thus enhancing recovery.

There is a “fad diet” out at the moment called the “GI diet” but GI (glycaemic Index) itself is not a fad but a scientific measure of the speed at which foods affect your blood sugar levels. At university, we spent whole afternoons eating various foods and then taking blood glucose readings to witness how they affected the blood and therefore overall body fat and energy levels. By eating foods which are low/moderate GI the blood sugar levels are more gradually affected and as a result insulin production is balanced, avoiding increased body fat, especially around your tummy. Such foods include eggs, fish, tofu, lean meats, hummus, seeds, nuts, natural yogurt, green vegetables, oats, basmati rice, fruits such as apples, plums, and peaches. High GI foods to avoid include white bread, potatoes, sugar, chocolate and pasta.

If you diet too rigorously, this usually involves some form of starvation. When the body is starved of nutrition the first casualty is good lean muscle; the body enters into ketosis where muscle protein is converted back into glucose for energy. This occurs because the only fuel the brain can use is glucose and if the body does not get enough from your diet the body will do whatever it can to supply the brain. The end result of less muscle is slower metabolism, less muscle-to-weight strength and a lowered immune system, increasing risk of injury. Ketosis also creates very poor sleep patterns, compounding the problem.

There is little to be gained from starving yourself and great benefit to be enjoyed by eating low/moderate GI foods. This system sounds simple - but the truth is it simply works!

Dr Simone Parkinson, is head nutritionist at The Third Space Medicine (www.thethirdspace.com). She cannot enter into any correspondence. Before following her recommendations, you should consult your own medical adviser about any medical problems or special health conditions.