

Beef, Lamb & IRONMAN

ANZCO Foods are on a mission to bring you nutrition and good health from New Zealand's finest beef and lamb, and we are proud to be a Premier Partner of Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand. Sport Nutritionist and ultra-marathon runner Mikki Williden offers up some essential nutritional advice that is as relevant to everyday New Zealanders as it is to the elite athletes that line up at the Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand start line in Taupō every March.

Why is nutrition so important for athletes, whether they be professionals or weekend warriors?

To be a successful athlete you've got to be healthy – that's fundamental. Races like Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand are such tough events to prepare for and compete in, so getting the fuel you need to train and recover, and having the metabolic efficiency to access enough calories when you need them, are critical to success. Like the oil in your car, nutrition is the thing which keeps your body running smoothly.

And what role does beef and lamb play in that?

To get fitter, athletes have to train. This breaks down muscle that needs to be repaired and rebuilt. Beef and lamb are fantastic sources of protein and amino acids as well as micro-nutrients like iron, zinc and B12. Iron helps carry oxygen around the body, while zinc is vital for the gut and immune system. We also need creatine to support muscle recovery, cholesterol to balance hormones, carnitine for fatty acid metabolism, and choline for brain function – all of which are found in beef and lamb.

So, how much beef and lamb do we need?

Athletes have traditionally focused on the importance of carbohydrates, but we are now starting to realise just how crucial protein is. In fact, global experts now suggest that the current recommended dietary intake of protein is only about half of what we really need to function at our best every day. Ideally, we should be trying to consume about 1.6 grams of protein per kilo of bodyweight, which means if you weigh 70kg, you need 112g of protein daily. One of the best ways to achieve these levels is by eating beef or lamb at least 3-4 times a week. For athletes training for an event like Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand, those targets should be bumped up even further.

Can beef and lamb help athletes post-event as well?

Your body is in serious trauma after a long-distance event such as Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand, thus the focus needs to be on recovery and healing. Increasing your protein intake to 2.4-2.6 grams per kilo of bodyweight for the week after a race and adding in foods rich in anti-oxidants, such as berries and dark green leafy vegetables, will aid significantly in that process.

How do you know if your diet is on point?

You'll know – you'll definitely feel the difference when you get your diet on track. For athletes it can be helpful to get some base-line blood markers done by your doctor that will check your levels of B12, zinc, folate and iron. If you find it difficult to recover from sessions, or have symptoms that might suggest insufficient levels of nutrients, then you can get them measured again. It's also worth recording things like sleep quality, recovery and how you feel in general. Food tracking apps can be useful and keep a training log – remember, you cannot manage what you don't measure!

And finally, any tips for Kiwi's to help stay on track with their nutrition and maintain their good health?

It's really not that complicated. Eat a balanced diet of whole foods and you'll have a really solid foundation to build on. Preparation is important – if you can put aside time every week to pre-cook and prepare meals you'll be so much more likely to succeed. Make sure you're getting plenty of clean, lean protein such as beef and lamb. An easy recipe I love at the moment is premium mince mixed with beef liver – which is an amazing source of iron – rolled into meatballs, coated in Moroccan seasoning and air-fried. Give it a go!

"Experts now believe we're only getting half the daily in-take of protein we really need. Beef and lamb is an important source of protein."

Mikki Williden

Sport Nutritionist and ultra-marathon runner

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