

HEALTH TIPS FROM THE OLYMPIC ATHLETES

By City Center Health and Fitness Staff

The Olympic athletes have trained vigorously for 4 – 8 years leading up to the games. Athletes ensure they are in top physical and emotional shape the day of their event. There is no room for error and no allowance for getting sick.

So how do the athletes stay healthy in the weeks and months prior to the games? According to the Canadian Olympic Team medical advisors, the same methods our family doctors use to keep us healthy are applied to the athletes. This means flu shots, getting lots of sleep, adequate nutrition and stress management.

Sports psychologists work with athletes to help them manage pressure. A stressed out athlete can lead to a sick or injured athlete. Deep breathing, relaxation and other techniques like visualization are used to calm the nerves. Most athletes also use a form of visualization to enhance their performance. It is not enough to imagine themselves on the gold medal podium. Athletes are trained to visualize every movement of their event. What does a great performance look like? How do they move their arms and legs? These techniques are useful to enhance performance and to help deal with the stress.

This step by step visualization process can be used by anyone who is attempting to reach a goal. Often people are told to visualize the outcome such as new body they are seeking or to see themselves at their new fitness level. The key, however, is to visualize the steps it takes to achieve this new body. Olympic athletes have been focused on this every day for many years. Focusing on the process and not the outcome is what leads to gold medal success.

Sleep is another key component to staying healthy prior to the games. The well planned schedule of each athlete usually includes 8 – 10 hours of sleep daily. US Olympic head coach Terrance Mahon says “ if you want to be an Olympic athlete – go to bed ” In addition to 8 – 10 hours of evening sleep Mahon recommends that all US athletes get a 60 – 90 minute rest during the day to restore physical and mental energy.

The number of dietitians and nutritional experts that form part of the Olympic teams' entourage show the value athletes place on nutrition. Tweaking their diets, paying attention to iron intake, and proper hydration are just some of their concerns. If healthy Olympic athletes trust the experts to help them with nutritional planning, then the general public can use this same expertise to help them meet their goals. Nutrition truly is a science. By discussing goals and current eating habits with someone who understands nutrition, one can fast track themselves to success, regardless of their athletic abilities.

Nothing could upset an athlete more after years of training than to fall sick or get injured just days or even hours before their event. Travel, change in routine and the added stress of this major competition can play havoc on the athlete's immune system. All participants in the 2010 games were encouraged to have the H1N1 immunization as well as the

seasonal flu shot. Many teams are making it mandatory that team members wear masks while travelling on International flights.

Kelly Ann Erdman, RD from Calgary is the lead dietitian for the Olympic bound Canadian athletes “When the athletes are performing, their bodies are obviously under stress. There’s the psychological stress plus they are bombarded with all the germs that have come in from all over the world,” Ms. Erdman says. “It’s a constant for athletes: How can they stay healthy?” Ms Erdman says her role is to educate the athletes on healthy living habits. She says they have a team of sports psychologists to help with the stress and nutritionists to help with the diet. There is only so much they can do to keep the athlete healthy, and sometimes it comes down to luck.

City Center Health and Fitness - 399 Main St. Penticton offers a selection of health and fitness packages including the Quick Fit – Healthy Body program for busy people who want to make positive changes. Their team of medical and fitness professionals work with all fitness levels.