

# HEALTHY LIVING

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## Fuelling the competitive fire

### Balanced diet can improve performance

JOANNE SASVARI  
FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

As an avid runner, cyclist and former member of the U.S. national rhythmic gymnastics team, Ingrid Knight-Cohee knows the importance of eating well to fuel a workout.

"It's a distraction if you're hungry. If you're hungry, you're not 100 per cent there," says the acting director of health and fitness at Vancouver's YWCA, who also does yoga and strength training.

"If you're drawing from an empty well, your energy output is going to be so much less."

The question is, what kinds of foods actually make an athlete run?

Protein? Carbs? So-called superfoods? Supplements?

Not according to Canada's nutrition experts.

"It's the old boring statement, but following Canada's Food Guide is the best advice," says dietitian Carol Dombrow, spokeswoman for the Health and Stroke Foundation.

"If you want to be healthy, follow Canada's Food Guide. It really makes a lot of sense, and it's designed for specific ages and genders now."

True, top-level professional athletes may have different requirements than weekend warriors. But even among the competitive set, the most important ingredient in the diet is still balance.

"There is no need for supple-

ments of any kind if you are eating a well-balanced diet," says Terry Graham, chair of the Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences at the University of Guelph.

"Rarely does one need a protein supplement. One should have at least 50 per cent carbohydrates and ideally predominantly whole-grain carbohydrates."

It all sounds like common sense. But in recent years, we have been inundated with so many contrary and conflicting nutritional reports that it's easy to get confused.

It's not just the carbs-versus-protein debate that has us muddled. It seems that every few months a new superfood is touted, whether it's an antioxidant-rich fruit, such as blueberries, pomegranates and acai berries, cholesterol-reducing oatmeal, cancer-fighting turmeric or fatty fish, such as salmon, which is loaded with omega-3 fatty acids said to reduce coronary disease.

These are certainly healthy foods and part of a balanced diet. But none of them is a magic bullet.

Just as important as what you eat is when you eat it.

"If you're going to be exercising in the next few hours, you should probably eat a snack like a peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole wheat bread or a bowl of cereal with berries and milk," Dombrow says.

"You have a combination of the carbs and the protein and the minerals and vitamins you get from those foods."

After all, she notes, "You eat different foods from different groups for a reason."

For her part, Knight-Cohee rarely goes more than three



Don MacKinnon, for Canwest News Service

Ingrid Knight-Cohee, acting director of health and fitness at Vancouver's YWCA says it's important to fuel, and refuel, a workout to get the best possible results.

hours in a day without eating something: "Generally speaking, what you want to do is graze rather than having one big meal a day," she says.

She always eats before a workout, usually something light that balances carbs, proteins and nutrient density, such as yogurt or a mix of nuts and dried fruit, which will provide sustained energy without bulk.

"Never train on an empty stomach; never train on a full stomach," she says.

It's just as important to eat after a workout, Knight-Cohee adds. "A lot of times what

people neglect is refuelling 30 minutes after exercise. It's quite crucial."

That's because a post-workout snack actually helps build your body's energy for your next workout.

Drink plenty of water, eat lots of small meals, balance your carbs and proteins, look for nutrient-dense foods — it's a simple prescription for fitness. So why do we make it so complicated?

"Generally we tend to be too busy to eat properly," Knight-Cohee says. "It takes planning, but you have to train yourself to eat properly."

### Online

■ To download a copy of Canada's Food Guide, visit the Health Canada site at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php).

■ For more information on the Heart and Stroke Foundation and its advice on nutrition, fitness and healthy living, visit [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca).



Courtesy Brian Huntington

Ali Howard, a 33-year-old professional chef, will be swimming 610 kilometres in 28 days to draw attention to the Skeena River in B.C.

## Swim to highlight unspoiled treasure

JULIE BEUN-CHOWN  
FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

When Ali Howard wades into the frigid headwaters of the Skeena River in northwestern B.C. today, the 33-year-old professional chef will literally be up a 610-kilometre-long creek without a paddle.

Not that she'll need one — she's planning to swim.

Accompanied by a nine-person crew, including two kayakers, a whitewater raft and a specially trained team of supporters, Howard hopes to achieve what's never been done before: complete the treacherous 610-km swim in 28 days. The expedition, which begins just south of the largely inaccessible and remote Spatsizi Plateau, will end in the Pacific Ocean, near Prince Rupert.

Dubbed the Spirit of the Skeena Swim, Howard says she's taken on the epic journey to draw attention to the future of the untouched and undammed Skeena, home to "one of the largest intact predator-prey ecosystems left in B.C." and a \$10-million local wild salmon industry, according to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The area may see the beginnings of industrial development next year if energy multinational Royal Dutch Shell goes ahead with a 1,000-well coal bed methane drilling operation at the headwaters, a move protesters say will impact ecology on the Skeena and two other rivers.

Shell Canada spokesman Larry Lalonde says nothing has been disturbed so far in early investigations, and the company "has taken a break from exploration activities where we have tenure to explore for natural gas and coal" at the provincial government's request.

And to keep it that way, the Ot-

### Online

■ For more information about Spirit of the Skeena Swim, visit [www.skeena-watershed.com/swim](http://www.skeena-watershed.com/swim)

tawa woman is determined to get down the river in one piece.

"It's miles from anywhere," Howard says of the region. "It's one of the longest rivers in North America, and the watershed itself is larger than the area of Switzerland."

Such determination doesn't surprise Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition executive director Shannon McPhail, who says Howard began training for the swim last November after reading about Slovenian conservationist Martin Strel, who swam the entire Amazon River in 2007 for clean water awareness.

Since then, Howard has maintained a hectic schedule of swimming, weight training, soccer and squash. Not satisfied with that, she would even strap weights to her ankles and wrists while pulling 16-hour shifts in the kitchen at The Cliffs at Kispiox River resort, where she is executive chef.

"I've seen her put some bread in the oven, get something started on the stove and do 50 pushups or sit ups when waiting for things to cook," laughs McPhail.

The journey will be broken into a series of daily swims between 15- and 40-km long, some of which will include navigating difficult Class 4 white water.

"I'm afraid of my shoulders breaking down and getting tendinitis," Howard says. "But my discomfort and the hazards I face pale in comparison to what could happen to the river and watershed if we don't draw attention to it."

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