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**Green Bay  
Packers  
dietitian Adam  
Korzun creates  
winning  
menus for elite  
athletes**

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Adam Korzun (Sargent'05) was recruited to fuel the Green Bay Packers in 2014, a time when college and professional sports teams were racing to bring on dietitians.

**B**ACK WHEN HE WAS an undergraduate at Johnson & Wales University, Adam Korzun worked in Boston's elegant Four Seasons Hotel, preparing meals in the kitchen of its five-star restaurant. These days, as a sports dietitian, Korzun (Sargent'05) creates menus aimed at providing food that's more high-test than haute cuisine.

Korzun is director of performance nutrition for the NFL's Green Bay Packers and a nutrition consultant to many other world-class athletes. The Alabama native was schooled in meal preparation at Johnson & Wales, and later learned how to make those meals as healthful as possible at BU's College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College, where he focused on nutrition and exercise physiology. Two years after earning a master's in 2005, he signed on as a sports dietitian for the US Olympic Committee, creating menus that would help kayakers build a powerful core and shoulders, give weightlifters quads of steel, and keep pentathletes running, swimming, shooting, fencing, and riding.

He later became the sports dietitian for the United States Ski and Snowboard Association and worked with athletes training for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. That year, Team USA won 37 medals, more than any team in the history of the Winter Olympics.

In 2012, Korzun was director of sports nutrition at the University of Oregon. He was recruited to fuel the Green Bay Packers in 2014, a time when both college and professional sports teams were racing to bring on dietitians. Today, 20 of the 32 NFL teams have at least one sports dietitian; 10 years ago, one team did. Professional baseball, hockey, and basketball teams are also starting to welcome dietitians aboard.

*Bostonia* caught up with Korzun on the road in Texas and asked him about eating for optimal performance.

**BOSTONIA: You have worked with athletes in several sports. How different are the foods demanded by different sports?**

**KORZUN:** A lot of the underlying principles of good nutrition are the same in all sports. You eat balanced meals, you balance carbohydrates and proteins, and you make sure that you hydrate. Hydration is very important. But different athletes in different events have different needs.

Downhill skiing is a two-minute event and cross-country skiing—like a 50K—could be two hours long. So you apply the same nutrition principles, but you have to adjust them to the person and to the demand. A two-and-a-half-hour football practice, for example, is like no other event, and a

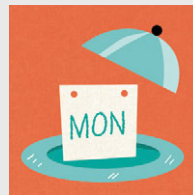


## NUTRITION TIPS FOR THE REST OF US

Adam Korzun (Sargent'05), director of performance nutrition for the NFL's Green Bay Packers, weighs in on how weekend warriors should eat.



**Forget about the idea of healthy foods.** Instead, be intentional and focus on balanced eating to achieve your goals. Ask yourself: What is the goal behind my eating? Balanced lifestyle? Training for something? Adding weight? Losing weight? Determine what your healthy is. Whole grains are considered healthy, agree? For example—a whole-grain bagel is a healthy part of a breakfast before that 50K ski. But is it healthy for the diabetic taxi driver who wants to lose weight? So determine your healthy foods. Don't just follow the marketing and media.

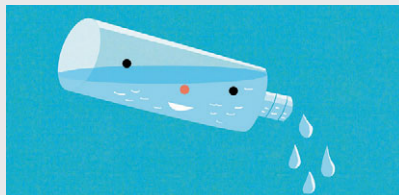


**Build a routine for your week.** Highest-volume work equals more calories; rest days and low-volume work equal fewer calories and cleaner eating, meaning fresh vegetables, fruits, unprocessed proteins, nutrient-dense—not calorie-dense—foods.



**Treat a snack like a mini meal—**make sure you have a balance of protein, fats, and carbs.

**Hydration is a critical component** of training, and it's essential for cooling. Try weighing yourself before and after training and aim to replace every pound you lose with 16 to 20 ounces of water or electrolyte drink.



**Have a plan for your meals,** and try not to react. It's better to plan to indulge in foods than to react to a situation and have a cheat meal.



**Postworkout recovery** is critical when training for performance. Aim for around 20 grams of protein and a mixture of carbohydrates based on the intensity of your workout.

professional football player will make it through countless two-and-a-half-hour practices. A cross-country skier will very often train for two and a half hours as well. But does that make the effort the same? Is one more difficult? Of course not. Just like a cross-country skier may not make it through a football practice, the football player wouldn't make it through a cross-country ski race. Each athlete has an individual physiology, both genetic and obviously, trained.

So when working with each athlete, it is important to take into account the demands of the sport, the physiology of the athlete, the clinical needs of the athlete, and of course the personal preferences of the athlete. Just because football practice and

a 50K both take two hours doesn't make them the same. Football is repeated, very short maximal efforts (with obvious impact) and periods of rest and recovery, while a 50K is a sustained effort that builds to a max effort. Both are amazing physical accomplishments...but they are very different.

**We know that the timing of meals is important. What would a good pregame meal provide, and when should it be eaten?**

From a prepractice perspective, you need to convert a lot of food into energy, and having a steak and immediately walking onto the field is not going to work. That energy is not going to be available. It also depends on the event. You have to

## FAST COMPANY

Sports dietitian Mary Ellen Kelly works with elite athletes

Now a consultant, Mary Ellen Kelly (Sargent'04) was the NFL's first full-time female team dietitian.

WHEN MARY ELLEN KELLY WAS studying to become a sports dietitian in 2004, the Division 1 triple jumper sensed a growing awareness among athletes of the importance of eating well. What she didn't see coming was an exploding awareness by teams of all kinds of the importance of sports dietitians. Neither did her colleagues.

"I remember saying to my friends and professors that I wanted to work with elite-level athletes. And they were saying, 'Well, that's not really happening,' and they were right. In 2000, about five universities had full-time dietitians working with their athletes," says Kelly (Sargent'04). "Today more than 75 colleges and universities have at least one dietitian and some have three or four."

The same surge of appreciation for people like Kelly has swept across professional sports teams. Kelly's career has followed the curve. She graduated from BU with a degree in nutrition and dietetics in 2004, and earned a master's in clinical nutrition

from New York University in 2005. She started advising varsity teams at St. John's University, then at the University of North Carolina. In 2014, she jumped to the Miami Dolphins—becoming the NFL's first full-time female team dietitian. Kelly now works as a consultant for Baylor University and Drexel University, where she is an online adjunct professor, and for marathoners and triathletes, as well as many people who suffer from food allergies or gastrointestinal disorders.

And while she does develop nutritional plans for individual athletes, she considers her role first and foremost to be an educator, someone who teaches athletes how to fuel their bodies so they can perform at the highest level possible.

"Every year there are more teams hiring dietitians," she says. "These days they include everything from club teams to the Olympics to the military. Students hoping to get into sports nutrition are hitting the profession at a time when growth is exponential."



make sure that an athlete is fueled for the activity that he or she is going to participate in. That could mean certain foods the day before an event, or it could mean bedtime snacks. Many people think it starts with a prerace pasta dinner, but it really starts much farther out than that.

The farther out you are from competition, the more I focus on a meal. Let's say it's morning and you're going to play at 7 pm. We can get a real balanced meal with good complex carbohydrates: sweet potato, oatmeal, and good grains combined with fats. You can do whole-grain pancakes with peanut butter on them for healthy fat, then protein from eggs. You can do the complex meal because your body has time to process it and

convert it to energy stores. The closer you get to competition, the more you go with something simple, because you're looking for a quick blood sugar spike for rapidly available energy. That's when you look for fresh fruit or fruit juice. That's why you see so many of these energy gels and bars. They're just simple carbohydrates that don't require much breakdown and can be easily absorbed.

### What about postgame?

Coming off a performance, we're focused on muscle recovery and managing inflammation. That means refueling carbohydrates and proteins as soon as you're done. We're going for a quick shot of protein right away—a protein shake or



a smoothie. I'm not talking about when you get home. I mean when you get to the locker room, before you shower and before you go for treatment. The reason is, from a physiological standpoint, you have initially active receptors from recently contracting muscles. They help shuttle carbohydrates to muscle. Your body is helping you refuel, so take advantage of that.

#### **Do you create a diet for a particular sport or for a particular athlete?**

We individualize diets for each athlete. We create a platform, a meal setup that every person, regardless of their goal or energy needs, can use, and from there we educate them on individual goals. Not every wide receiver is the same. One may need a little more fat because he is coming across the middle and has to absorb hits, and the other may be a speed guy who is going to eat a bit leaner. Some athletes need to lose weight, while others need to gain weight, so there are meal setups, and then within those there are personalized goals.

#### **How do the athletes respond to your efforts?**

Athletes are much smarter these days and much more aware of the benefits of proper fueling. A lot of athletes are very vocal about that, and about the amount of money they spend keeping their bodies in prime condition. When they come to me, they already understand what a carbohydrate does, so I take it to the next level. But it's the athlete who does the work.

From my end, it's helping to educate and guide them toward a routine to improve performance. How, for example, do you help a pitcher develop a routine so he's ready every five days and can have optimal performance in between sessions? The same with football. You know when you're going to play and you know what your workouts are going to be, so how do we match nutrition to meet those needs. It has to become a routine. If on game day you're worrying if you had enough to eat, you've missed the boat.

#### **How important is a good night's sleep for athletic performance?**

Sleep is one of the pillars of fitness. Sleep is when your body is able to rebuild and repair itself and get ready for the next day. We give athletes a lot of advice: sleep in a cool, dark room with no distractions, no blue lights, and no screens. We set it up so it's almost like a sanctuary. We actually have custom beds at training camp.

#### **Are there foods that optimize the healing of injuries like sprains and bruises?**

I wish I could say yes, but I can't. I can say that as part of recovery, we like to implement protein

at the right time, as well as antioxidant-rich and nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, heart-healthy fats, and turmeric that will provide the body with nutrients without stressing the recovery process. The idea is to provide clean foods that don't contain chemicals and junk that the body needs to sort through to get to the nutrients. In healing, the body is working extra, so we aim to not make it work harder. We definitely stay away from junk that is not going to provide your body with a healing benefit.

#### **Can you describe a particular diet that you recommend for your athletes?**

There is no single diet, and athletes don't need to eat the same every day. If you have a heavy training day, you may want a higher carbohydrate day. By carbohydrates I mean fresh fruits or sweet potatoes. Also, squash is good, and brown rice and quinoa, or beans. They are all great carbohydrates. For protein we run the gamut: we have chicken and a lot of beef. We have more eggs than you can imagine, and we have fresh fish, pork, and a lot of bison. Tofu is a good nonanimal source.

#### **How do you feel about beer after a workout?**

Well, first of all, here in Wisconsin, beer is part of life. I think, like anything, the answer comes down to timing and being intentional about it. Not overdoing it. There is no forbidden food or drink, but there is a need to be intentional about it. If you are having a couple of beers or a glass of wine with your family at the end of the day and it helps you unwind and puts you in a restful state, there is nothing wrong with that. Also, maltose in beer is one of the highest glycemic sugars, so by that logic, beer is good if you are trying to refuel after a race or a hard training session.

