



Answering your questions

I've had the pleasure of communicating with a number of you who were responding to something I wrote in my column or seeking answers to a particular question.

In this month's *Nutrition Edge*, I will share my responses to a few of those questions. Hopefully you will find the answers helpful as you continue on your quest for fitness and athletic performance. I love hearing from you, so keep the questions coming.

Q ARE ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS SAFE, AND CAN THEY REALLY AFFECT MY WEIGHT LOSS NEGATIVELY?

Let me start by saying that I don't like to put artificial, man-made substances into my body. Artificial sweeteners are created in a laboratory; they are not natural in any sense of the word. And research has shown that such substances can sabotage your weight-loss efforts by decreasing your brain's natural ability to monitor calories and increase your likelihood of overeating.

The fact of the matter is that saccharin, the first of these artificial sweeteners, was accidentally discovered in a laboratory at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. Since then we have also been introduced to aspartame, sucralose and neotame, which is derived from aspartame.

Let me give you a brief chemistry lesson on one of these sweeteners. Aspartame is synthesized from aspartic acid and phenylala-

nine. The body breaks down aspartame into these amino acids along with a small amount of methanol. Methanol is metabolized to formaldehyde and formic acid. Formaldehyde is classified by the World Health Organization as a probable human carcinogen and is the major source of controversy over aspartame's safety.

Now, do I want to trust my health to some scientist in a laboratory or corporate executives whose primary interest is in making a profit? Unless a product has conclusive evidence that it is safe and there is no controversy over its safety, I wouldn't recommend using it. Remember how doctors and the government wrongly bought into the safety of hormone replacement therapy? Now, after decades, scientists tell us that it does in fact cause cancer. So if man made it, don't eat it. Use a little natural sugar, honey or stevia — a South American herb estimated to be 150 times sweeter than sugar — instead. You'll be healthier in the long run.

Q ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS TO USING CREATINE?

Creatine has established itself as one of the most effective and popular supplements available for people wanting to build muscle and improve performance. And rightfully so because it does accelerate gains in muscle size and strength compared with exercise alone. Research conducted at Penn State University showed that creatine users ended up

stronger and gained twice as much muscle compared with subjects using a placebo.

There are claims, however, that creatine users are more susceptible to cramps, muscle spasms and even pulled muscles. However, research published in the journal *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* reported that in a group of 26 athletes using creatine for up to four years, there was no difference in the reported incidence of muscle cramps or injury compared with athletes not using creatine.

A more recent study, published in the September 2004 issue of the *International Journal of Sports Medicine*, also shows that creatine side effects are rare. However, please keep in mind that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." Some experts believe high doses can lead to kidney and liver problems. Therefore, if you're suffering from liver or kidney problems or are predisposed to such ailments, you should probably stay away from using creatine.

Del's 10-Minute Recipe of the Month

Steak with Bourbon Glaze

Ingredients:

8 oz. lean steak
3 tbsp. Dijon mustard
3 tbsp. bourbon
1/4 cup low sodium soy sauce or Braggs Liquid Aminos

1/2 tsp. brown sugar
1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
1 cup asparagus
1 cup vegetable or beef broth
1/2 tsp. cornstarch
1 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

Makes 1-2 servings

1. Cut steak into small bite-size cubes and season with salt and pepper.
2. In a separate bowl, combine bourbon, mustard, soy sauce, sugar and Worcestershire sauce, then add steak. Marinate.
3. Heat oil in a skillet and cook steak on all sides until brown.
4. Add cornstarch and half the vegetable broth to left-over marinade, mix together with a fork, then add to skillet. Reduce heat and simmer for five minutes.

5. In a separate saucepan, steam asparagus in beef or vegetable broth over low-medium heat for five minutes.

6. On a plate, serve beef and asparagus together. Enjoy!

Comment: The combination of bourbon and Worcestershire sauce gives this dish a unique flavor. Substitute chicken for steak if you don't eat beef.

— From Del's latest book, "Simply DELicious"

Q

HOW MUCH MUSCLE CAN YOU REALLY GAIN IN A YEAR?

Yes, I do remember those days when I felt like I was trapped in the body of a skinny teenager. For those of you who feel this way, putting on weight can seem painfully and frustratingly slow. Some people gain muscle quickly. Others, however, make little or no progress at all. If you're trying to figure out how much muscle you can realistically gain in a year, the simple answer is that there is no simple answer.

Some people are just genetically predisposed to gaining weight easily and can therefore rack on 10 pounds of muscle in six weeks. Still, others may do all the right things and gain only a few pounds. So if you have a body designed for long-distance running, it's unlikely that you'll be winning the Mr. America contest in the next few years.

The most important thing is to be realistic. If what you're doing isn't working, change it up. If you haven't seen any results over the past three to four months of training, your program isn't working. Also keep in mind that muscles are made in the kitchen not the gym. If you're trying to put on muscle, your nutrition program has to focus primarily on weight gain. Don't be fooled into thinking that you just want to "tone up" a bit. People who look well built and toned look that way because they have a lot of muscles to tone up.

So, can you realistically gain 20 pounds of muscle in a year? That is not the norm, but it can be done. I gained 10 pounds of lean mass in less than 12 weeks. For the vast majority, however, three to six pounds of "lean muscle mass" is a more realistic goal over a six- to 12-week period if you have the right training and nutrition program.

Q

HOW DO I GET RID OF THE CELLULITE ON MY THIGHS AND BUTTOCKS?

Cellulite is a term coined by America's corporate money-generating machine to describe the deposits of fat with a cottage cheese appearance found on the thighs and buttocks of many women. And while there are many myths about what cellulite is and how to best get rid of it, the truth is it is just plain, ordinary FAT.

In fact, a recent study published in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, which was conducted by researchers from New York's Rockefeller University, reported that cellulite is simply fat under the skin that has a dimpled look. It looks this way because women have a layer of irregular and discontinuous connective tissue immediately below the skin.

They found that the layer of connective tissue is more irregular and discontinuous in women affected with cellulite. But the fat cells themselves aren't different from other fat cells in the same area of the body.

However, an entire industry has been built around the false notion that cellulite is a different type of fat that requires a special diet, lotions, creams, potions and other expensive treatments to get rid of it. So how do you get rid of cellulite? The same way you would get rid of excess fat from any other part of the body — diet and exercise. <<

— Del Millers is a fitness and nutrition consultant and author of three books. Visit his web site at delmillers.com or send questions to del@LASandF.com.

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