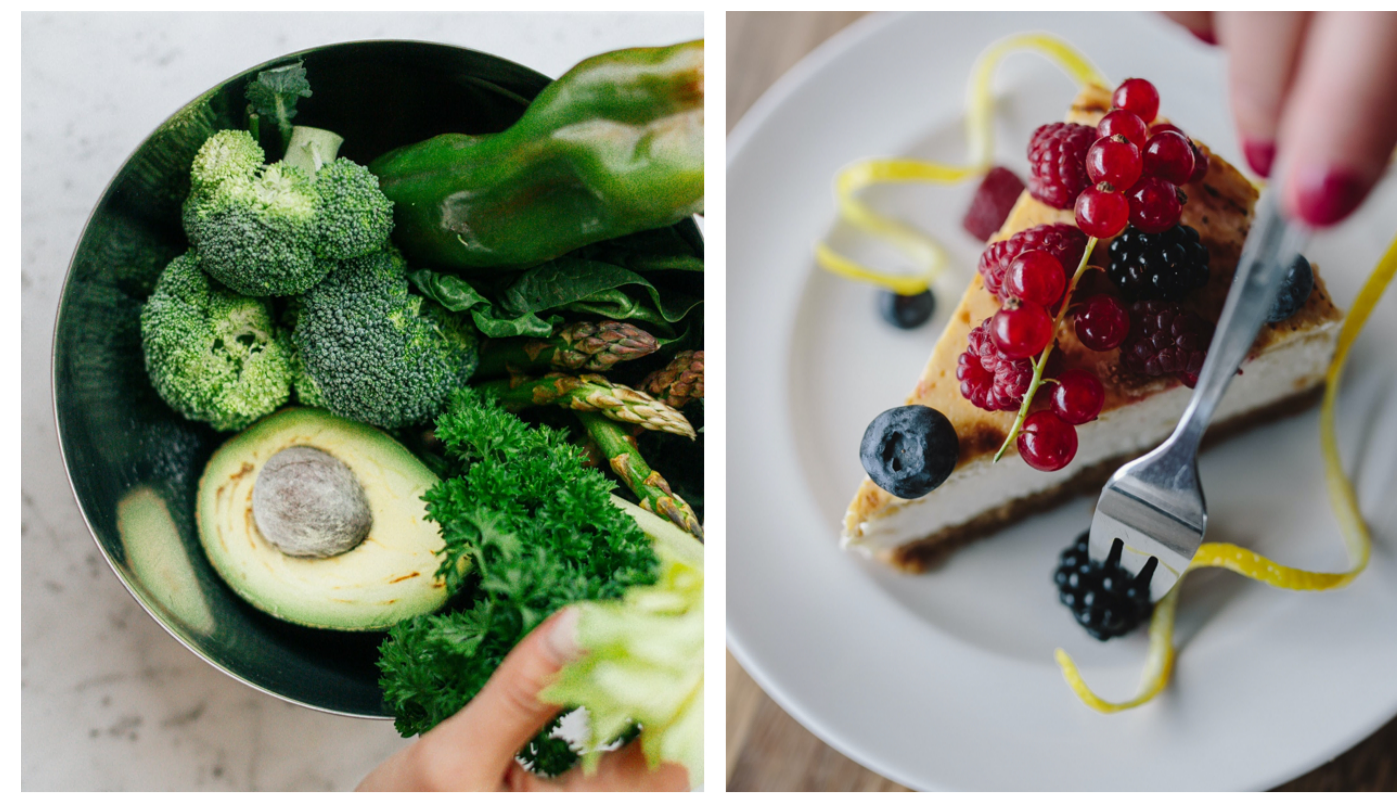


# Why balance is the key to your healthy eating plan

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These days, it seems there's a new diet plan, program or fitness fad popping up every week - each claiming to be the one-size-fits-all approach to healthy eating and staying on track. While it can be hard to know how to achieve our goals (whatever they may be), it can also be incredibly easy to feel guilty if we do enjoy an occasional treat. We spoke to some of the world's top athletes about their eating habits and why it's actually good to take the pressure off yourself and find a balance that works for you, your body and your lifestyle.

## Enjoyment is the key

Being diagnosed with Coeliac disease was life-altering for champion windsurfer, Saskia Sills. Not being able to eat wheat and gluten meant an entire dietary overhaul for the Paris 2024 gold medal hopeful, but she hasn't let her new nutritional restrictions dampen her passion for health, food and generally feeling good.

Saskia has a great love of whole foods and strongly believes that what you fuel your body with directly impacts your performance in life. As with training, so it is with food, according to Saskia, who suggests asking the question, "is this food that I'm putting into my body really going to get the best out of my body?" It's a great way to check in with yourself, Saskia says: "I think that's the number one tip, just to really think about the food that you're putting into your body."



However, this top athlete also emphasises the importance of enjoying yourself, especially when it comes to food. As much as she acknowledges the importance of giving your body the best fuel possible, she says she is aware that keeping your mind happy is equally key. Saskia notes, "The philosophy I have is that you can have whatever you want, just try and have a little bit less processed and a little bit more whole food. And if you're eating well 80 percent of the time, then 20 percent of the time you can eat whatever you want."

"I have chocolate in my porridge every morning," she reveals. "If I don't allow myself that piece of chocolate in the morning, or I don't allow myself the joy of life, then it becomes a very miserable journey. I think whatever you're doing, you need to enjoy, because you're not going to get the best out of yourself if you're not having a good time." It's important to recognise that happiness is truly one of the best motivators, according to Saskia, and can definitely be applied to a healthy, well-rounded lifestyle.

## Avoid burnout at all costs

Excelling at both football and boxing throughout her athletic career, Stacey Copeland knows a thing or two about establishing a regime. She brings balance to her life through a strong sense of discipline when she's actively training for a fight. With boxing, weight is a very specific detail when it comes to competing, so Stacey is used to following a strict plan when she needs to. "You have that exact weight that you have to be, or you just don't compete," she says.



When Stacey spoke to team GB nutritionists, she worked with them to curate a specific and detailed meal plan that she still uses to this day when preparing for a fight. This gets results but, as Stacey acknowledges, "mentally, it's tough" to keep a very particular eating plan going. "I've pretty much followed the same thing for many years. And it's worked really well for me."

With an unrelenting diet comes not only a potential mental struggle, but the possibility of burning out. Stacey doesn't follow this routine daily, she claims, because a seriously strict plan can be far too taxing to maintain long term: "Avoid burnout, [it's fine to] have a nutrition plan if you know why you're doing it, but you need to make sure you aren't burning out."

As much as your goals are important, so is enjoyment and having fun with it." Go for your goals but remember to be kind to yourself along the way.

### Listen to Isaac Chamberlain's tips on simplifying your healthy eating plan

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## Remember you're human

Martin Perry, professional Para table tennis player is all about a healthy balance. He advises that it's "about making good choices and good decisions when it comes to food and nutrition." With a common-sense approach, he believes it's essential to recognise when you can treat yourself and when you need to be a bit more disciplined... However, one thing you should never feel is guilty!



Martin recalls how he and his team would often go out for a pizza and a beer together, ensuring there was no guilt about wanting to slightly veer away from a strict health regime. Martin highlights the importance of being mindful of both ourselves and others, especially when it comes to nutrition or exercise plans.

"When you do have that sort of cheat day, you know what, that's fine, that's completely allowed. That's human."

Enjoyment is such an integral part of motivation, no matter your goals are, says Martin, and making time to find pleasure in what you're doing is imperative. Just make sure you "still have fun along the way, that you don't miss out on going out for music, your friends or teammates or family, that you don't miss out on these experiences. And that's what life is about. It's just balance."

### Listen to Sophie Coldwell's advice on treating yourself occasionally

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## Balance science with nature

As a Para Team GB rider, Verity Smith is an incredible athlete and, therefore, very familiar with nutritional plans. However, she is also aware that listening to her body is one of the most important things she can do when it comes to health. "Sometimes you wake up and you feel really tired, and perhaps you do need a bit more sugar or perhaps you do need a little bit more carbohydrates," she says. "And I think I try very much to listen to my body as well as listen to my training dietary routine."



She notes the importance of having a balance, especially when it comes to science and nature. You may have the most in-depth daily diet plan to follow, but sometimes your body tells you it requires something different. In that case, it's about appreciating the science of nutrition and using your own intuition to get the best from yourself. "I just think it's being sensible, but also having a balance between [the] science of the diet and the training regime, and also listening to your own body."

Being kind to yourself is one of the healthiest ways to reach your goals, according to Verity. It keeps us motivated and more likely to enjoy what we are doing. Flexibility, balance and trusting yourself are key to achieving your dreams, because after all, "we are not machines."