

Fueling Your Climbing: Why Energy Balance Matters More Than You Think

Rock climbing is one of the most demanding sports out there—physically, mentally, and metabolically. As climbing has exploded in popularity, especially since its Olympic debut in 2020, researchers have been looking closely at how nutrition and energy balance affect performance and long-term health.

One critical topic that's gaining attention in the climbing community is **Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (REDs)**. Simply put, REDs occurs when climbers don't consume enough energy (calories) to match the amount they burn during training and daily life. Over time, this energy mismatch can impact performance, recovery, and overall health.

What Is REDs?

Originally recognized as the “Female Athlete Triad,” REDs is now understood to affect both men and women. It occurs when **low energy availability (LEA)** disrupts essential body functions like hormone balance, bone health, immune system strength, and even mental focus. For climbers, this can mean:

- Decreased muscle strength and endurance.
- Increased risk of overuse injuries or stress fractures.
- Impaired recovery between climbing sessions.
- Mood changes, fatigue, and decreased motivation.

Why Climbers Are at Risk

Climbers often strive to maintain a lean body composition to maximize their strength-to-weight ratio. While this can enhance performance, overly strict diets or unintentional under-fueling can lead to LEA. Research shows that **a surprising number of elite climbers fail to meet their daily energy needs**, especially when training intensively.

Warning Signs of REDs

Some early signs include:

- Constant fatigue or lack of power during climbs.
- Frequent injuries or slower recovery times.

- Unexplained drops in performance.
- For female athletes: irregular or missing menstrual cycles.
- For male athletes: reduced libido or low motivation.

How to Prevent REDs

1. **Prioritize Nutrition:** Focus on balanced meals with adequate carbs, protein, and healthy fats. Carbs are especially important for refueling after a climb.
2. **Don't Skip Recovery Fuel:** Eating within 30–60 minutes after a session can make a huge difference in performance and muscle repair.
3. **Listen to Your Body:** Low energy levels, irritability, or trouble sleeping can be signs that you need more fuel.
4. **Work with Professionals:** A sports nutritionist or strength coach (like at Nomadic Performance) can help create a plan that matches your training demands.

Why This Matters

Climbing is about longevity as much as it is about strength. By fueling your body properly, you'll **climb harder, recover faster, and prevent injuries** that can sideline your progress. Education and awareness around REDs are key steps in building a healthier climbing community.

Want to Learn More?

Nomadic Performance offers **custom strength and nutrition plans** for climbers designed to boost performance while keeping your body healthy and resilient. Check out our free resources in the bio and let's take your climbing to the next level.