

The Nourished Dancer

Sally Hodgson

*A holistic approach to a dancer's
nutrition for longevity*



About the Author

Sally Hodgson

Nutritional Medicine, BHSc



Hi there!

Thank you for taking the time to read through what I believe is essential information for a dancer at any stage of their training or career.

I was born in Perth and started dancing at the age of 5. I attended a theatrical based school, learning jazz, tap, ballet and even Irish dancing. I have to say I could not imagine a happier childhood than having the opportunity to dance. The life skills I learnt through dancing have helped me in all aspects of my life. Very early on I learnt the invaluable skills of discipline, team work, perseverance, resilience and dedication.

I developed an interest in Nutrition after suffering debilitating anxiety and panic attacks as a teenager. My diet had a large role to play in improving these conditions during this period of my life.

Since completing a Bachelor of Nutritional Medicine, I am able to blend my two loves of dance and nutrition together to provide a specialized service.



naturo.nutritionist@gmail.com

<http://www.naturonutrition.com.au>

0435 123 532



naturo.nutritionist



the_dancers_nutritionist

Table of Contents

1

Nutrition- The Basics

Page 4

2

Dance Class, Rehearsals and Shows

Page 10

3

Nutrition Toolkit

Page 15

4

Lifestyle

Page 18

5

Meal Ideas

Page 22





1

Nutrition The Basics

Introduction

Success as a dancer requires dedication, passion and many years of training.

For a dancer, the body is the instrument and must be cared for.

Optimal nutrition is essential to a dancer's life, impacting their energy, strength and recovery. Nutrition education is one of the most powerful tools that a dancer can learn at any stage of their training and career.

This ebook is designed as a base education about nutrition and how it may affect you as a dancer. There is never one size that fits all when it comes to your diet so I encourage you to always listen to your body. Most of the time it will be telling you what makes you feel energised and what doesn't agree with you.

I believe in taking a holistic approach to nutrition as you will discover on the pages to follow. To be at an optimal health status, our lifestyle is just as important as our diet. Lifestyle factors include your quality of sleep, how you manage your stress levels, your emotional and mental wellbeing.





If you remember one thing...

Throughout this ebook, I will cover many aspects of nutrition and how they benefit your body. If there is only one thing you remember from this book, its that wholefoods, in most circumstances, are the better option to provide you nourishment.

What does *Wholefood* mean?

Wholefood is 'food that has been processed or refined as little as possible and is free from additives or other artificial substances.'

As an example, wholemeal bread (or anything wholemeal) is made using the whole seed including the bran, the germ and the endosperm. White bread generally only uses the endosperm. The bran and the germ is where the majority of the fibre, vitamins and minerals are held. By removing these nutrient rich layers of the seed, the white bread lacks beneficial nutrients for our body. While companies fortify the bread once processed, this does not equate to the levels of a wholemeal bread that has not been heavily processed.

I am the first to admit that sometimes, due to availability, illness or time constraints, the handful of lollies or chocolate bar is going to happen. Lollies and chocolate are highly processed foods, not wholefoods. Its not about restricting yourself on these occasions, its about balance- I am a big fan of the 80/20 guideline of 80% healthy choices and 20% allowance for treats and special occasions.



The Macronutrients

What are they?

The body requires protein, fat and carbohydrates in large amounts on a daily basis. A balanced meal contains all three macronutrients. The purpose of a balanced meal is to provide the body with energy and to keep you feeling satisfied in between meals.

Protein

Protein is essential for the growth, development and maintenance of our muscles, blood, hormones, hair, skin, and nails. Including a portion of protein at each meal will help provide a constant supply to the body and help you feel satisfied in between meals.

Fat

Fat is required by the body to maintain healthy cells, balance hormones, absorb vitamins that are fat-soluble and keep you warm. There are different kinds of fats that have specific purposes in the body. For example, omega 3 fatty acid may help to reduce inflammation and improve depression symptoms.



Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the main source of fuel for the body, helping to provide energy to our muscles, nervous system and brain. Complex carbohydrates are more beneficial to the body than simple carbohydrates as they release energy slowly which helps to balance blood sugars and manage weight. Carbohydrate sources are not limited to grains; carbohydrates are also found in fruits and vegetables so load them up on your plate!





Just as important

Micronutrients

These are nutrients consisting of vitamins and minerals, that are required by the body in smaller amounts than the macronutrients.

Micronutrients include fat-soluble and water-soluble vitamins, macro-minerals and trace minerals.

These cannot be produced by the body and therefore we need to include micronutrients in our diet.

The vitamins and minerals help all aspects of our body including growth and development, supporting our immune system, hormone balance, organ functions, memory and hundreds of other uses.

A diet containing a wide range of fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, wholegrains and meats will ensure that we are providing the body with all these necessary nutrients to help it perform at its best.

Fibre

Super important word here! Fibre is what helps remove waste from the body, preventing toxins entering through the intestines and building up in the body. Meals containing fibre will help keep you fuller for longer and balance your blood sugar levels. Fibre is also a great food for the good bacteria in our gut.

Hidden surprises in food

My basic rule of thumb is: If you can't read or pronounce the word, or don't recognise the ingredient, then it's probably not wholefood! This means it is a food additive which is used to improve the texture, colour or flavour of the product.

Many people can be sensitive to certain food additives and these may cause gut symptoms, mood imbalances or skin concerns.



Nutrient Density

Nutrient density is the amount of nutrients provided to the body per kj / cal (kilojoule or calorie) of energy. Nutrients are essential for our cells to produce energy, our bones to remain strong and our brains to remember routines just to name a few of the amazing uses! As dancers, the requirement for nutrients is greater than those who are less active.

Keep in mind that nutrient density is very different to energy density.



For example- 100g of rocket in your salad is packed with nutrients- folic acid, beta-carotene, multiple B vitamins, vitamin C, vitamin K with trace amounts of copper, calcium, iron, potassium, manganese and phosphorus. You get all of these nutrients for roughly 100kj, less than 1g of fat, less than 3g of carbohydrates and 3g of protein.

In contrast to this, 100g of choc chip cookies contains very few nutrients, small amounts of potassium, iron, B6, magnesium and vitamin A but is a very energy dense food at roughly 2050kj, 28g fat, 341mg sodium, 58g carbs and 6g protein.

Of course this doesn't mean that you should never have a choc chip cookie as a treat, they are delicious! It's about making conscious choices about that will benefit your body, most of the time.





2

Nutrition
Dance Class, Rehearsals
and Shows

Timing is Key

What do you eat, when?

This is a big question for many dancers. The timing, portion and choice of food can greatly impact your performance. These are important points and could have a negative impact, if you run out of energy half way through a performance, or experience stomach cramps because your food has not digested in time. On the other hand, timing of food intake may enhance your performance by helping you feel on top of your game.



What is the magic solution?

The reality is, everyone has a different metabolism and gut health. Some dancers will be able to eat something small 20 minutes before a performance and others will have to make sure they leave 60 minutes in between. This takes a bit of experimenting, with both the types of food you select and the timing of them. This will pay off once you have found your own 'sweet spot'.

Classes are the perfect opportunity to work out the foods that are going to work best for you in different scenarios. Do not wait until performance night to try something new.

I would recommend keeping note of the foods you eat, and how long before class. Then you can reflect after class if you had energy the entire time or if you experienced any discomfort. This will help to identify what works best for you.

Keep in mind that on performance night, your body will be in a state of nervous excitement which may impact your ability to digest foods properly. For these scenarios, be prepared early and eat the foods that sit well with you and which you have tried and tested in class.



Before Dancing

Aim

To provide yourself the fuel to mentally and physically get through class, rehearsal and performance.

The right fuel for your body will:

- ❖ prevent fatigue and therefore lower your risk of injuries
- ❖ help your brain to remember choreography
- ❖ provide energy without feeling sluggish
- ❖ prevent digestive discomfort while dancing

A full meal may be eaten 2-3 hours prior to dance. This meal should have a balance of carbohydrates, protein and fat – please refer to the Portion Plate on page 17.

If you are starting with a morning class, where you will be warming up, then 2 hours is plenty of time. If it is before an intense or long performance, leave the 3 hour gap to allow your body to digest the meal. Keep in mind that this doesn't mean you won't eat again before performing, but it will be smaller portions with less fibre and fat to help speed up the digestion.

A snack 90 to 30 minutes prior to your class, rehearsal or show needs to contain slow releasing energy without the bulkiness of fibre that may cause discomfort. Please remember that certain foods agree with some people more than others so experiment with your before class snacks and find the ones that are right for you!

Within 90 minutes

- Apple with peanut butter and sultanas
- Oats / porridge with milk (almond, coconut) with berries, small serve!
- Yogurt (natural Greek, coconut) with a piece of fruit or fruit salad
- Fruit smoothie
- Homemade muesli bar
- Banana pancakes (egg, banana, oats)

Within 30 minutes

- Piece of fruit- a banana is perfect for this time
- Small handful of nuts / trail mix
- Bliss ball
- Stuffed date (stuffed with nut or seed butter)
- A couple of pieces of dried fruit
- If you struggle with digestion and need some energy quickly, try an orange, coconut water or sometimes, jelly beans



After Dancing

Consuming a substantial meal following exercise is one of the most beneficial things you can do for yourself.

By refuelling your energy stores and providing your body with a combination of carbohydrates, protein and fat, you potentially reduce your recovery period. Ideally, you would consume this meal within a 2 hour window from when you finished your exercise.

Replenishing your muscles will help reduce muscle fatigue, speed up muscle repair and this may lead to improved performance with a lower risk of injury.

Keep in mind that what you choose to put in your body will impact your recovery. You want to maximise the nutrients in your meal so they work together, making you stronger.

Lighter options

After a shorter class or rehearsal, a Pilates or yoga class

- Wholemeal toast, nut butter and banana
- Hummus and tuna on toast
- Avocado on toast with seeds
- Muesli, yogurt, banana and almonds
- Rice crackers and peanut butter with banana
- Rice cakes with ricotta, tomatoes and rocket
- Rice paper rolls
- Brown rice sushi
- Chia pudding

More substantial

After a long or intense class or rehearsal, or following a performance

- Wholemeal pasta, chicken and veggies
- Salmon with sweet potato and salad
- Avocado and eggs on toast
- Mexican salad bowl or wrap (beans / meat, salad and rice)
- Vegetable stir fry with brown rice and chicken / tofu
- Eggplant lasagne

Rehydrate! Dance studios are often kept at a warm temperature to help keep your muscles warm in between exercises. This can lead to a very sweaty class or rehearsal. If you have noticed you are sweating more than normal, try swapping your water straight after rehearsal for some coconut water. This will help to replenish your electrolytes that are lost through sweat and prevent your body developing an electrolyte imbalance.



Prep prep prep



Organisation

This is essential for a smooth-running week!

By being prepared and organised for the week ahead, you are more likely to stick to your food plan and less likely to make choices that will be unhelpful for your body.

The easiest way to start is by creating a meal plan on the same day each week. Start by planning all your breakfast or snack foods and as you see the benefits, increase planning for as many meals as you would like!

Tips-

- ❖ Prepping vegetable sticks on the weekend for the week- these can be added to salads, stir fry or eaten with hummus for a snack
- ❖ Chop smoothie fruit and vegetables into containers or zip lock bags and freeze. In the morning, select your daily portion and blend
- ❖ Prep protein into containers and add fresh salad for first couple of days (2-3 days). Choose a week night in where you can prep for the rest of the week
- ❖ Cook extra dinner so leftovers can be used for lunches with some extra salad thrown in
- ❖ Bliss balls, homemade muffins and snack sized quiches can be made in advance and frozen. On days when you are rushed or unprepared, these frozen snacks are a lifesaver!
- ❖ Keep a box of muesli bars in the cupboard- it is always better to have something to grab when in a hurry than going to class hungry!





3

Nutrition Toolkit

Reading food labels

Reading food labels is a valuable skill to learn and may assist in choosing the best available products. Try to look past the marketing of the product (the 'fat free' or 'natural' claims). Being able to read and understand the nutritional value and ingredients is the most valuable tool you can have.



1. Headings and subheadings- the 'saturated' fat makes up a portion of the 'total' fat. 'Sugars' make up part of 'carbohydrate'- aim for under 10g of sugar per 100g using the 100g column.
2. The suggested serving size- you need to pay attention here to how much you actually have. The serving suggestion of cereal may be 1/3 cup but if you are filling your deep bowl to start your day, you could be consuming 2-3 times this amount!
3. The 'quantity per 100g' (or 100ml if liquid) information is handy to compare similar products with each other. The figures in the 'quantity per 100g' column are the same as percentages. For example, if 20 grams of fat is listed in the 'per 100g' column this means that the product contains 20% fat.
4. All ingredients in a food product must be listed on the label in order from largest to smallest by weight.
5. Storage instructions for food safety.
6. The label may make a number of nutrition related claims such as 'gluten free', 'low GI', 'low fat', 'reduced salt' or 'high fibre'. These means that the product meets strict criteria set by the government.



Protein



A serve of animal protein = the palm of your hand. Other sources- eggs, tofu, tempeh, quinoa, lentils, beans (kidney, chick, black)



Fats



1Tbsp- olive oil, avocado
nuts, seeds,
butter

Starch



1/2 cup of complex carbohydrate-
sweet potato, buckwheat, whole
meal pasta, brown rice, barley,
oats, quinoa, sorghum, 1 slice of
whole grain/ whole meal bread

Vegetables

Fill 1/2 your plate (2 cups) with non-starchy
vegetables- lettuce, spinach, kale,
artichoke, asparagus, bean sprout, beetroot,
cabbage, broccoli, cucumber, mushroom,
leek, tomato, capsicum, onions,
cauliflower, carrots,
sprouts



The Portion Plate

This portion plate can be used for the whole family. This represents a well-balanced meal that provides plenty of nutrients. Your plate doesn't need to look this for every meal, but it should be used as overall guide. You can achieve this by swapping a portion of your pasta for zucchini noodles, adding extra vegetables to your mince or swapping some of the mince for beans and grated vegetables!

Remember its all about balance- if you are having a pizza night, enjoy the pizza without the guilt!





4

Lifestyle



Stress

Stress is not always a bad thing, it causes a natural fight or flight response in our body and is essential to keeping us alive in emergency situations. Stress can be either physical or emotional - and both affect the body by stimulating the same hormones. These hormones are involved in an adrenalin rush and the nervous excitement before a performance.

Stress becomes an issue when it is experienced continuously over a prolonged period. This can lead to chronic neurological and physiological change in the body - including insulin resistance, which can impact body weight, hormone disturbances and suppression of the immune system. All of these conditions would have a large impact on a dancer's ability to maintain performing at a high level.

As dancers, there is a level of aesthetic that is expected when auditioning. Dancers are to appear strong and lean which can be a hard balance to achieve and maintain. As stress can impact our body weight, skin and hair health, its important that you are able to recognise when you are feeling stressed.

Prevention is the best form of treatment for stress. Tips to help manage stress:

- ❖ Maintaining a balanced diet
- ❖ Ensuring adequate sleep and rest
- ❖ Breathing exercises
- ❖ Meditation
- ❖ Talking to someone you trust
- ❖ Writing your experience down
- ❖ Painting, drawing or other crafts



Sleep

A good night's sleep is vital for life as a dancer. One poor night's sleep can affect memory, mood and judgement. Our sleep is controlled by our circadian rhythm and many hormones play a part in getting us off to a good night's sleep.

If you are struggling with a good night's sleep, take into consideration the following:

- ❖ How long before bed are you having dinner?
- ❖ How much are you eating at night time?
- ❖ What foods are you eating for dinner, and after dinner?
- ❖ Does dinner include stimulating food such as MSG or artificial sweeteners?
- ❖ Are you exercising too close to bed time?
- ❖ What temperature is the room you are sleeping in? Is there air flow?

Avoiding caffeine after midday is recommended, depending on your sleep schedule. A coffee at 1pm may mean that caffeine is still in your system at 10pm that evening.

Herbal teas may help promote sleep; try chamomile, lemon balm, passionflower about an hour before bed.

Essential oils such as lavender either on a flannel next to your pillow or through a diffuser.





Healthy food relationship

Food is nourishment, and it should be enjoyed. We use food in all areas of our life, to bond with family and friends, celebrations and commiserations.

Many of us also have an emotional connection with food which is completely normal so no need to be hard on yourself about it. Food involves our vision, taste and smell. When we have a particular food again, we are reminded of the place we were when we first experienced it. This is nourishment for our soul and is just as important as the nutrients in the food!

Here are a few things to help you on your journey to a healthy food relationship:

- Instead of avoiding food that brings you pleasure, or punishing yourself for giving in to temptation, eat the food mindfully and enjoy every mouthful. Once you have finished, acknowledge how good the food tasted and move on.
- Work to understand the emotions behind what you are eating. Sometimes we eat when we are sad, stressed or frustrated. If you do feel out of control when you are eating, start writing down why you think you are feeling this way, or what has prompted this feeling to occur. This may take practise to be able to identify, but keep trying. Once you have started to identify the feelings or what is prompting them, you can work on ways to better deal with these situations.
- The same applies to restricting your food intake. While lots of information is provided to us about how much energy, fat, carbohydrates and protein we need in number format, the truth is that everyone is so different and these numbers can be far from the truth of what you need!





5

Meal Ideas

Meal Ideas

Full disclosure here, I am not a chef or an amazing cook! These meal ideas are simple and manageable. Experimenting in the kitchen is great, as is having a wide variety of foods in your diet. A standby menu will assist during the busy periods.



Breakfast

- ❖ Oatmeal with milk or non-dairy alternative- stir in ½ tsp of cinnamon to help balance blood sugar and top with fruit such as banana or berries for flavour
- ❖ Muesli with milk or alternative- find a muesli that contains a range of grains, nuts and seeds. Avoid flavoured muesli as they contain a lot of added sugar – add your own flavour with fresh or frozen fruit
- ❖ Banana pancakes- blend 2 eggs, 1 banana and a tbsp of oats/ almond meal/ linseed meal, pan fry like mini pancakes- optional to add cinnamon or vanilla essence
- ❖ Whole meal toast with the following options for toppings-
 - Avocado and asparagus
 - Tahini and banana
 - Goats cheese, mushrooms and rocket
- ❖ Fresh fruit salad with natural Greek yogurt, topped with pumpkin and sunflower seeds and crushed raw nuts
- ❖ Green smoothie- 1/2 banana or 1/3 cup mango, handful of spinach, ½ chopped cucumber, 1/3 cup chopped celery, 1 heaped teaspoon chia seeds, 3 mint leaves, ½ tsp ginger, 1 cup water, squeeze of lemon. Or create your own smoothie! Add your favourite fruits and vegetables with some milk, milk alternative or coconut water. Add some chia seeds or oats to boost the smoothie and keep you feeling fuller for longer.



Lunch

- ❖ Rice paper rolls with chopped cucumber, carrot, chicken (or substitute) and avocado
- ❖ Niçoise salad – lettuce, boiled potatoes, green beans, tomato, boiled eggs, optional anchovies and tuna
- ❖ Chicken / tuna, avocado and salad wrap
- ❖ Sushi rolls – brown rice will boost the nutrients
- ❖ Legumes or mixed beans and a rainbow salad – any vegetables!
- ❖ Mixed roast vegetables (sweet potato, beetroot, cauliflower, broccolini, mushrooms), add some cannellini beans, drizzle some tahini or use hummus as a dipping sauce
- ❖ Mexican salad bowl or wrap – shred lettuce, carrot, cucumber, tomato, avocado, beans and brown rice or whole meal wrap
- ❖ There is always room for an extra salad on the side!



Dinner

- ❖ Swap spaghetti noodles for zucchini spiral noodles, or go half and half
- ❖ Add extra vegetables to your spaghetti mince- grate zucchini and carrot through the mix or chopped mushrooms and capsicum
- ❖ Swap lasagne sheets for sliced eggplant or wholemeal pasta sheets
- ❖ Use herbs and spices instead of premade commercial sauces that often contain inflammatory oils and added sugar
- ❖ Making homemade burgers? Try using chopped lettuce heads or Portobello mushrooms for the bun
- ❖ How about homemade pizza? Try using eggplant or sliced cauliflower as the pizza base
- ❖ Finely dice (food processor) cauliflower until a rice-like consistency and pan fry for a vegetable rice alternative
- ❖ Aim for at least 1 meat free dinner a week



Snacks

- ❖ Natural Greek yogurt / coconut yogurt topped with pumpkin and sunflower seeds
- ❖ Vegetable sticks with hummus or tahini
- ❖ Green smoothie (see breakfast)
- ❖ Small handful or raw nuts
- ❖ Fresh dates with nut butter
- ❖ Brown rice cakes with tomatoes and rocket
- ❖ Bliss balls
- ❖ Avocado on wholemeal / rye/ sourdough bread or toast
- ❖ A banana with nut butter or tahini



Tips

- ❖ When buying milk alternatives such as almond milk, check the ingredients to ensure there is no added unnecessary sugar. Fresh fruit or a tsp of honey can be used to sweeten naturally
- ❖ Yogurt should be natural Greek yogurt. Check the ingredients list to make sure the only ingredients are milk and live cultures / bacteria



What next?

I hope that this ebook has provided you with some valuable tips to implement into your lifestyle.

Food is not only fuel for our bodies, but to be enjoyed without guilt or negative associations. The nourishment comes from not only the vitamins and minerals, but from the experience and joy of eating.

Nutrition is such a young field and we are continuously discovering new aspects. I encourage you to always remain curious about how foods affects you as an individual.

Please remember that your needs are unique and if you are experiencing concerns about your dietary habits, please contact me for personalised dietary guidance.

I wish you all the best on your dancing journey.

Kindest Regards,

Sally Hodgson

naturo.nutritionist@gmail.com

www.naturonutrition.com.au

0435 123 532

