

the healthy swimmer



Tina Rencell

Bounty of the Northwest

Winter is a great time to enjoy the juicy fruit from the *Pyrus* tree, commonly known as the pear. The pear is thought to have originated in present-day western China, where the trees spread east and west along mountain chains and evolved into a diverse group of more than 20 widely recognized primary species.

In the United States, with several delicious varieties coming from Washington and Oregon, pears are primarily the bounty of the Pacific Northwest. According to the Pear Bureau Northwest (www.usapears.com), the region is the best geographic region in the United States for the climatic and geographic factors needed to produce high-quality, delicious pears. The blend of rich volcanic soil, abundant water, warm days and cool nights creates ideal growing conditions for the pear varieties found in the Northwest.

Pears are a good source of vitamin C and copper, containing 11.1 percent of the recommended daily value for vitamin C along with 9.5 percent of the daily value for copper. Both nutrients are antioxidants that help protect the body from free radicals. The pear is considered a hypoallergenic fruit, which is often recommended as a safe start for introducing infants to fruits. <<<

reader recipe

Pear crisp is a simple, easy and delicious way to get more fruit in your diet. This low-fat, reduced calorie recipe can be made with any variety of fresh pears.

Simple Pear Crisp

_____ 6	large pears
_____ 1/4 c	sugar
_____ 1 pinch	salt
_____ 2 T	cinnamon
_____ 2 T	Balsamic vinegar
_____ 1/2 stick	butter
_____ 1/2 c	whole wheat flour
_____ 1/4 c	brown sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Peel pears and cut into slices. Mix pears, sugar, salt, cinnamon, balsamic vinegar and 2 tablespoons of flour in pan. Combine butter, the remaining flour and brown sugar in a separate bowl, mashing until crumbly. Place the pear mixture into a pie pan or baking dish, and sprinkle brown sugar mixture over pears. Bake for 35-45 minutes, until fruit juices bubble at the edges. <<<

Serves 6. Calories per serving: 260; calories from fat per serving: 63.

>>> DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE OUR READERS WOULD ENJOY?

Send it to editor@usms.org, or mail to: Reader Recipe, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.

Preventing Cold and Flu

Cold and flu season is here, and it's a good time to think about ways to boost your immune system. Masters swimmer and nurse practitioner Laura Evans of Greenfield, Mass., offers some simple health tips to avoid the flu.

"The season ranges from November through March in the U.S.," says Evans, who works with a cardiology practice. "Both the common cold and influenza are viruses which can be spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing (airborne droplets), or touching a contaminated object (like a doorknob) and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes."

Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny and stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea also can be associated with the flu.

"To boost your immune system, get plenty of rest,

be physically active and drink plenty of fluids (avoiding alcohol and caffeine)," says Evans. "Eat a well-balanced and nutritious diet, manage your stress, avoid people who are ill and wash your hands frequently. You may consider taking a multivitamin if your diet isn't great."

Evans encourages discussing flu shots with your doctor each year.

"The vaccine is developed annually based on predictions of which strain of virus is anticipated to emerge," says Evans. "If you become ill, stay home if you can and keep your distance from others. This will help prevent passing the virus to those around you. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue, not your hand, when you cough or sneeze. And don't forget to wash frequently." <<<

>>> For more information, go to the Centers for Disease Control Web site at www.cdc.gov/flu.

READERS ASK: What about Vitamin C?

Q: Can Vitamin C really help prevent me from getting a common cold?

If so, how does it work, and what's the best way to sensibly add extra Vitamin C to my diet each day? Is it best to get my Vitamin C from foods, or in pill form?

A: "As with most nutrients, if you are missing Vitamin C in your diet, taking it will improve your overall health," says sports nutritionist and Masters swimmer Sunny Blende, M.S., of Sausalito, Calif. "But megadosing on any vitamin does not make you super healthy or prevent

unwanted colds." Blende writes a nutrition column for *UltraRunning Magazine* and swims with the University of San Francisco and the South End Rowing Club.

According to Blende, Vitamin C helps to keep the immune system strong, and works with Vitamin E as an antioxidant to squelch free radicals.

"As swimmers, we may breathe more oxygen than the nonathlete, and the process may produce more free radicals. So our need for Vitamin C may be higher than the average adult." Blende recommends getting these important nutrients from whole foods whenever possible.

"Supplements can be used for insur-

ance, but a diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables (four to five servings per day minimum) is all an active adult requires," says Blende. "Think color. The more colorful the fruit or vegetable, the more Vitamin C and other nutrients it usually contains."

Among the good sources of Vitamin C, Blende says, are citrus fruits and juices, papaya, berries, green and red peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, yams and spinach. <<<

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Handling Cramps

Most swimmers experience occasional muscle cramps, but what's the best way to handle a cramp?

"Muscle cramps are commonly recognized as involuntary contractions of muscles that don't relax," says Jane Katz of the USMS Sports Medicine and Science Committee.

"Cramps can occur in any skeletal muscle, but are most common in the legs and feet and muscles that cross two joints (the calf muscle, for example). Cramps can involve part of a muscle or all the muscles in a group."

Katz, a Masters swimmer and aquatics specialist for over 40 years, is a professor of physical education and athletics at John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, where she coaches the women's swimming team.

Katz says the most commonly affected muscle groups are the backs of the thigh (hamstrings) and lower leg/calf (gastrocnemius), the front of thigh (quadriceps), and the feet, hands, arms and abdomen.

"Muscle cramps range in intensity from a slight twitch or tic to severe pain," Katz says. "A muscle cramp can feel rock-hard and last a few seconds to several minutes or longer. It is not uncommon for cramps to ease up and then return several times before they go away entirely."

Katz says the exact cause of muscle cramps is unknown, but experts think it is related to poor flexibility, muscle fatigue or doing new activity.

"Athletes are more likely to get cramps in the preseason when the body is not conditioned and more subject to fatigue," says Katz. Other

factors associated with muscle cramps include exercising in extreme heat, dehydration and electrolyte depletion. "Cramps are more common during exercise in the heat because sweat contains fluids as well as electrolyte (salt, potassium, magnesium and calcium). When these nutrients fall to certain levels, the incidence of muscle spasms increases."

The good news is cramps usually go away without treatment, but a few simple tips should help speed the process. First, stop the activity that caused the cramp. Gently stretch and massage the cramping muscle, and hold the joint in a stretched position until the cramp stops. When it comes to prevention, Katz advocates improving fitness to avoid muscle fatigue, warm-up before exercise, and regular stretching after exercise.

"Most muscle cramps are not serious," says Katz. "If your muscle cramps are severe, frequent, constant or of concern, see your doctor." <<<

Three Great Stretches

●●● **Stretch the calf:** In a standing lunge with both feet pointed forward, straighten the rear leg while slowly bending the forward leg.

●●● **Stretch the hamstring:** Sit with one leg folded in and the other straight out, foot upright and toes and ankle relaxed. Lean forward slightly; touch foot of straightened leg.

●●● **Stretch the quadriceps:** While standing, hold top of foot with opposite hand and gently pull heel toward buttocks.

Count Your Calories

Do you have trouble maintaining your weight despite having a regular exercise routine? It might be time to start counting calories. The Mayo Clinic has an online calorie calculator that estimates the number of daily calories you need to maintain your current weight.

To use the calculator, simply enter your age, height, weight, gender and activity level. The calculator estimates your daily calorie needs, rounded to the nearest 50 calories. For example, if you're an active 45-year-old male who is 5'11", and weighs 175 pounds, the estimated

daily caloric intake for maintaining weight is approximately 2550 calories.

Since people judge the intensity of their activities differently and activity levels can change, calorie estimates should be used as an adjustable starting point. If you're pregnant or breast-feeding, are a competitive athlete, or have a metabolic disease, the calorie calculator may overestimate or underestimate your actual calorie needs. <<<

>>> To try the Mayo Clinic online calorie calculator, go to <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/calorie-calculator/NU00598>.

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