

INTRODUCTION - HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Wrestling is fun, exciting, builds character and teaches self-knowledge. Unfortunately, improper methods of weight loss and poor nutrition take away from those benefits. All too often, wrestlers believe that to be a better wrestler they must lose a lot of weight to move down one or more weight classes, or that punishing themselves by losing more weight makes them tougher. These are simply not true. Wrestlers do best when managing their weight properly through nutrition and correct training, and competing at their proper weight.

Also, like many young athletes, wrestlers often eat whatever is available and often forget that proper nutrition is an important part of gaining that competitive edge. Wrestlers often have the unhealthy idea that all food is “fat-producing”. They forget that food provides energy and vital nutrients to fuel and build their bodies. Think of your body like a car. If you put cheap gas in your car, it will run poorly. If you do not put any gas in your car (like starving your body) it will not run at all. Similarly, imagine putting fuel in your body to make your muscles run. Good nutrition is about knowing what foods and fluids make your muscles run best. It is about fueling your body at the right times and in the right amounts with the right types of food that will boost your daily energy, performance and health.

Wrestlers who do not practice proper nutrition end up doing unhealthy or inappropriate methods of weight loss and cannot perform at their best. Inappropriate weight loss occurs from dehydration, improper nutrition, improper training, or eating disorders and includes:

- ✓ Too much weight loss
- ✓ Too rapid weight loss
- ✓ Cycling of weight (repeated rapid loss and gain)

When wrestlers become dehydrated or fast too much their performance suffers and it takes about five hours for initial physical recovery, and up to two to three days for full recovery. New wrestling rules have moved weigh-ins up to one to two hours prior to competition in an effort to keep wrestlers from dehydrating and fasting too much. Wrestlers should emphasize year-round conditioning and nutrition to maintain a steady healthy weight, instead of doing unhealthy weight practices to lose weight quickly near to and during the wrestling season.

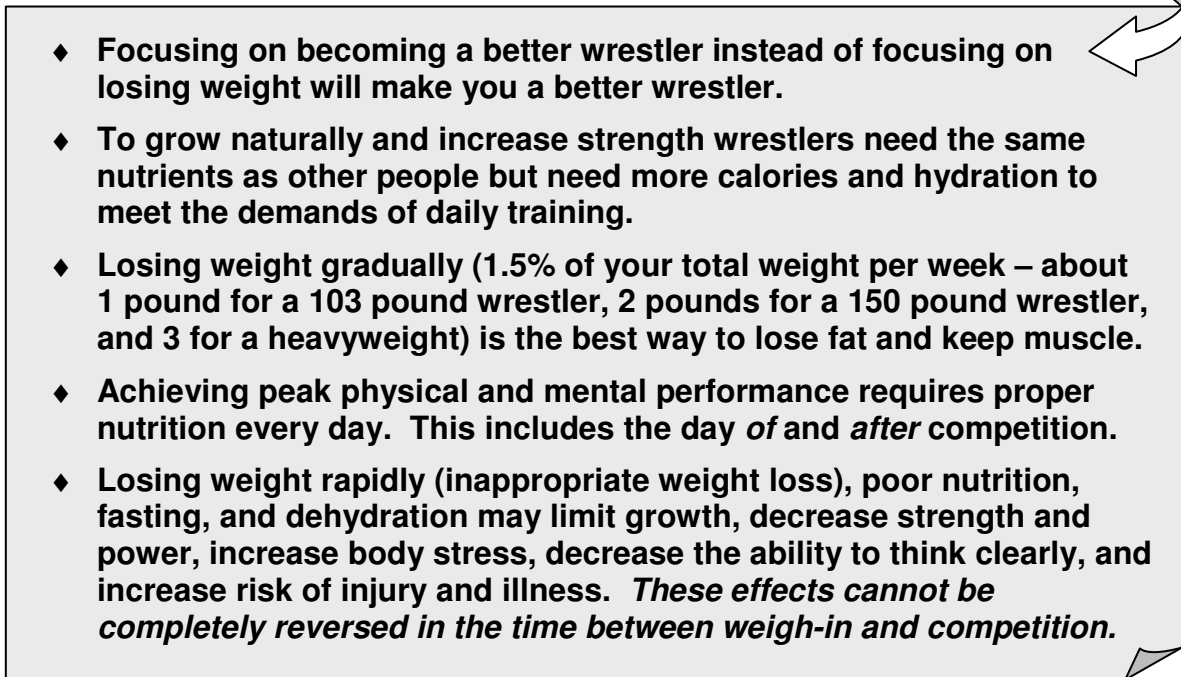
More importantly, unlike most athletes who tend to earn better grades during sports seasons, wrestlers are likely to experience poor focus and concentration, mood swings and tiredness resulting in lower grades during the wrestling season. Some of these problems appear to be from low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) from fasting as well as by the many bad effects of dehydration. One study showed decreased short-term memory in college wrestlers who “cut” too much weight, and who did it in the wrong way. Also, wrestlers should not rely on diet alone to manage their weight. (See “How Conditioning and Weight Training Relate to Weight Control” on page 13.)

Like many other sports, what is really important is not your weight but your body make up. Using the “fat-lean” model of body composition the combined weight of fat mass and lean

mass equals total body weight.⁽¹³⁾ Because weight alone does not discriminate between fat and muscle, it is a poor measure of body composition. Weight gain is either desirable or undesirable depending on whether fat or muscle is increasing. The best situation is to have an increase in muscle (lean mass with an increase in strength) with a maintenance or lowering of fat (extra weight). So weight itself is a poor predictor of success, *but fitness is*.

This book was written to help wrestlers get the full benefits of the sport by achieving their peak performance as close to their minimum natural weight as possible without compromising their health. This book is not about “cutting weight”, but instead about getting the right calories and nutrients from the right sources, knowing how conditioning and training apply to this, and avoiding lifestyle mistakes that can hurt you. Also, it’s intended to help wrestlers learn life-long, healthy eating habits that will benefit them long after they have stopped competing. As it makes a big difference if coaches and parents take an active role in meal planning and make sure that a variety of healthy foods are easily accessible, this book is written for wrestlers on all levels, coaches, trainers and parents.

The chapters in this book apply to different degrees to different age groups and levels of wrestling, but it is recommended that you read this book in its entirety. For example, wrestlers under 10 years of age should not focus on weight control, so chapters like “Weight Certification” are not as relevant to them. As significant growth occurs in the high school years, chapters like “Weight Class Certification” are very important to high school wrestlers. As you go up on your level of competition, chapters like “Nutrition” and how it relates to weight control *and* performance increase in importance. So some chapters are more relevant to college wrestlers than grammar or high school wrestlers. But chapters like “Eating Before Competition” and “Dehydration” are important for *all* levels. Important “take home messages” are printed in bold or italics, or are placed in boxes like the one below.

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- ◆ **Focusing on becoming a better wrestler instead of focusing on losing weight will make you a better wrestler.**
 - ◆ **To grow naturally and increase strength wrestlers need the same nutrients as other people but need more calories and hydration to meet the demands of daily training.**
 - ◆ **Losing weight gradually (1.5% of your total weight per week – about 1 pound for a 103 pound wrestler, 2 pounds for a 150 pound wrestler, and 3 for a heavyweight) is the best way to lose fat and keep muscle.**
 - ◆ **Achieving peak physical and mental performance requires proper nutrition every day. This includes the day *of* and *after* competition.**
 - ◆ **Losing weight rapidly (inappropriate weight loss), poor nutrition, fasting, and dehydration may limit growth, decrease strength and power, increase body stress, decrease the ability to think clearly, and increase risk of injury and illness. *These effects cannot be completely reversed in the time between weigh-in and competition.***