**Healthy Eating in the GAA**

It is hard to ignore the growing trend of ‘clean’ healthy eating that is sweeping Irish shores, unless you have been living under a rock, munching on a bag of Tayto and a Tangle-twister!

Regardless of this, Irish data\* shows that, despite two-thirds (66.4%) of Irish males surveyed being overweight/obese, 55% felt that they did not have to make changes to their diet as it was healthy enough. The message is loud and clear that what you eat can help you achieve your goals from exuding energy and health for that first date to living longer than your grandparents.

The following article discusses a number of areas through which eating good foods can help achieve your goals.

“There’s no better feeling than taking part in a tough session and refueling your body afterwards with the right food. There’s no point doing all the hard work exercising to undo it by taking in the wrong food" - Aaron Kernan, Club All Ireland Winner with Crossmaglen Rangers GAC

**Feed your Brain**

Is there anything worse than meeting them the morning after the night before and not remembering their name?! In light of keeping these embarrassing moments to minimum researchers have found certain foods contain nutrients which can help keep your thinking and memory sharp.

Omega 3 fatty acids, especially the type found in fatty fish and egg yolks are the most important for brain health, as 60% of your brain is composed of fat. A recent study found a significant increase in memory recall in older healthy people supplementing with omega 3 acids after a 6 month period compared to those using a placebo. A 2010 study found that people who ate food high in omega 3 acids had an approximate 40% lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s compared to people who did not. Enjoy an egg for breakfast and sardines for lunch to boost daily brain power!

**Boost energy levels**

Running low on energy can lead to an array of confusing behaviours from late night texting to missed business opportunities. Food is often merely seen ‘as a gap filler’ to grab and go until the next lull in energy levels. This is no way to treat the engine of a young Irish male tackling and achieving ground breaking work, social and training goals daily. To maintain energy levels throughout the day, eat smart, eat often and hydrate.

**Top tips to achieve this:**  
1. Preparation – at the weekend, make a list of lunches, dinners & snacks for the week ahead, shop for the ingredients, bulk cook and freeze to ensure the health kick lasts all week.  
2. Eat 5-6 times daily, snacking on; nuts, seeds, full fat dairy, nut butters, oatcakes, vegetables or hard boiled eggs.  
3. Include vegetables in your smoothie; a handful of spinach and/or kale.  
4. Swap your cappuccino for a green tea or fruit infused water.  
5. Have a small snack before bed.

"Preparation is key when trying to maintain a health balanced diet. If you’re not prepared in advance you can end up eating poorly as a quick fix to refuel. I would always try to make sure I was fuelling my body with good food in order to help my body produce good results.” - Aaron Kernan, Club All Ireland Winner with Crossmaglen Rangers GAC

**Prevent Aging**

To maintain those Irish good looks and defy the aging process, there are a number of foods to include in your shopping basket to help achieve just that. Blueberries are high in antioxidants which protect against skin damage from sun exposure and stress. Avocados are rich in Vitamin E essential for shiny hair and glowing skin. Foods high in fibre, such as broccoli and flaxseed, help maintain a healthy weight while also providing nutrients to help the skin retain is moisture and elasticity. The flavonoids in dark chocolate not only protect against ageing but have also been found to have particular benefits in maintaining a healthy heart.

**Bottom Line**

Eating healthily is no longer about not being allowed to leave the table until your plate is clean but is about getting excited about and enjoying good foods that give results!