

Gigi Berardi

Nutrition for Dancers: Basics, Performance Enhancement, Practical Tips

Liane Simmel and Eva-Maria Kraft

Translated by Richard Gilmore and Liane Simmel

New York: Routledge, 2018

Price: \$36.92 paper, \$31.88 Kindle

Nutrition for Dancers, written by Liane Simmel and Eva-Maria Kraft, is an information-rich guide for dancers looking for practical tips on nutrition and diet. Simmel is a dance medicine specialist and former dancer, and Kraft is a dancer and dance educator who specializes in nutrition. Simmel's credentials are many, having been a founding member and longtime president of *tamed e. V.*, the German Dance Medicine Association, and author of *Dance Medicine in Practice: Anatomy, Injury Prevention, Training*. Together, the authors have produced a nutrition guidebook that, as they say, is "long overdue."

The target audience of the book is dancers, and its aim is threefold: 1. to "...use food and nutrition as an important aid of health and wellbeing..." 2. "[assist in planning] healthy meals in spite of contradictory dieting tips and misleading advertising," and 3. "[assist in avoiding] a strict dietary plan and instead use simple principles to develop [dancers'] own individual nutritional strategies, without having to count calories."

These are much-needed objectives in dance education, and the general theme of relying on food basics and avoiding dieting mentality and practice (e.g., counting calories) is well developed in the book. To help dancers embrace such objectives, Simmel and Kraft offer many practical nutritional tips, as well as detailed discussion of complex topics such as blood sugar dynamics.

The book is divided into seven chapters: Chapter 1, The Basics—An Overview; Chapter 2, Drinking—Fluids Are Critical; Chapter 3, What? The Overwhelming Number of Choices; Chapter 4, When? Timing Is Everything; Chapter 5, How? Healthy Nutrition in the Daily Routine; Chapter 6, Fit and Slim—A Challenge for Dancers; and Chapter 7,

Tables of Foods and Nutrients. Also included are several appendixes, such as "Further Reading" and "Useful Websites," and a fairly detailed Index.

Of special interest is the introductory chapter on "basics." In this chapter, the authors mention the enormous number of chemical reactions constantly present in our body, the complex biochemical processes responsible for rebuilding and restructuring injured tissues, and the specifics of energy metabolism and body storage. The authors do not shy away from providing simple, straightforward descriptions of rather complex terms such as "oxidation" or "anaerobic energy production." The chapter also introduces the authors' sensible, practical "tips," marked by a light bulb icon. These range from how best to achieve balanced blood sugar levels with complex carbohydrates, to what is a good breakfast, to what to eat following an intense workout. Also helpful are their discussions of digestion anatomy and physiology and the role of fluids in signaling satiety. Fluids are discussed more in Chapter 2, which includes a discussion of "right drinks" (water) and those that need to be handled with care (caffeine-laden drinks, alcohol).

Chapter 3 contains standard information on daily nutritional requirements, as well as useful recipes for cold and warm breakfasts and main meals. Particularly beneficial is the "Snacks—Energy on the Go" section, which features fresh fruits and vegetables, do-it-yourself yogurt, and more. The section entitled "Practice Makes Perfect" is especially instructive as it is a clarion call for eating with all the senses (tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing, touching), and understanding sugar—again, with handy tips: "Frequently craving sweets can be a sign of an inadequate diet. Not getting enough complex carbohydrates or fats through your diet can cause sugar cravings."

Review copies of new publications should be sent to Gigi Berardi, 2813 Summer Street, Bellingham, Washington 98225. Those interested in reviewing books for this section should inquire by e-mail (gberardi@wwu.edu) and include their professional affiliation and area of expertise.

Chapter 4 is replete with more tips on the timing of eating to accommodate dancers' schedules as well as sample meal plans. Chapter 5's practical tips include those around shopping—navigating discount stores, supermarkets, organic supermarkets, farmers' markets, and more. Also discussed is how to read food labels, the power of advertising, the nutritional skinny on frozen foods, the convenience of having a few basic recipes that are easy to prepare, and, above all, the value of cooking.

Chapter 6 is especially valuable in that it takes on issues around dancers' slim physiques. To counter high, unrealistic expectations with regard to body image, Simmel and Kraft offer good information on the body's basic energy needs, total energy needs, body fat and body composition, maintaining body fat for health, the hazards of obsessing with numbers on a scale, and other influences on weight, such as "...increased training can result in muscle growth, which may cause your weight to go up." The authors advocate self-compassion and self-awareness in managing one's weight ("give your metabolism time," "develop your own tastes," "gaining a bit of weight on vacation is no reason to be alarmed," "be careful you don't eat too little," because "People who do not let the thought of food dominate their lives and feel comfortable in their own skin, are much less likely to develop an eating disorder"). The ensuing discussion on warning signs of an eating disorder, types of eating disorders, and avoiding eating disorders, is especially opportune.

It is interesting to see which nutritional battles the authors take on, and how. Some discussions might have benefitted by in-text references; rather, the authors favor the inclusion of a "Further Reading" appendix. It remains unclear how the authors tapped into their source material to use in discussion. Thus, I found some arguments lack-

ing, for example the discussion of fats, and in particular saturated fat. In Chapters 1 and 6 the authors highlight fat's important roles in the body, but the fat narrative falls into a rather conventional treatment of a controversial and highly-active research subject, neglecting to address the conflicting work on saturated fatty acids and cardiovascular disease risk, and thus the necessary role of saturated fats in our diet. Instead, the authors rely on vague terms such as "healthy fats" to make predictable diet recommendations.

Current research in nutrition is better seen in their discussion of problems with using the "glycemic index" of foods as an indicator of expected increases in blood sugar levels. The index is fraught with issues, and the authors take note of this. Noteworthy also is their discussion of the body's "emergency plan" for dealing with calorie deprivation resulting from counterproductive weight-loss schemes.

The authors reject some popular diet fixes that are highly problematic, for example, ready-made protein shakes. They advise caution with such "...highly concentrated, intensively processed foods with many artificial additives." Best is whole foods, and the authors show how to combine foods of varying protein quality to build complete, nutritious proteins. Their warnings regarding processed foods also extend to sports drinks.

In sum, although there are a few drawbacks to the book, including some unusual cross-referencing (actually, forward-referencing, i.e., referencing material that appears later in the book), the incomplete discussion on fats, and the lack of literature cited, these are balanced by some very strong selling points. *Nutrition for Dancers* boasts an information-packed conciseness, excellent readability, and singular clarity in much of the discussion. The clarity is enhanced by the many text call-outs, practical tips, tables, and diagrams. Dancers will find the text useful.