

the crew

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REPORT





Fuelling Your Crew the Right Way

A busy summer season brings many stresses and responsibilities that can leave your diet lacking in the vital nutrients needed to stay healthy. With nearly all the food a crew consumes prepared by the chef, now is the most important time to ensure the team is eating well to stay energised. Chef Cristina Topham looks at how to keep an eye on the diet of your fellow crewmembers when they are hitting peak season.

How many crewmembers have complained because they have put on a few extra pounds while working on yachts or their six-pack abs have given way to two-pack abs? Yachting is arguably one of the most challenging industries to work in while trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle – ironical for an industry that revolves so much around beach and water activities, and trying to look svelte in a swimsuit! Of course, it is nobody's responsibility to chase crew out of bed in the morning to go for a run or to look over their shoulder to make sure they are eating healthily. On the other hand, for many of the crew, especially during a busy charter season, getting a good workout is nearly impossible and diet is the only thing they can turn to to help keep them fit and sharp. With three meals a day being provided by the yacht and no option of going into the galley to cook a meal for themselves, what obligation does the chef have to understand basic nutrition and to make sure that there are healthy options on the table at crew mealtime?

Victoria Allman, chef of *MY Cocoa Bean* and a ten-year veteran of the industry, admits that when she first began on

yachts, she cooked like a restaurant chef – using rich, fat-laden ingredients and not necessarily focusing on nutrition. After some reflection she realised that the crew was relying on her cooking 340 days a year, year after year and she began to look at things differently. “These are not just crew, they are my friends,” Allman says, “and if they have high cholesterol or a heart attack due to their diet, it is my fault.”

characteristics of a well-functioning yacht crew needing to provide top service or handle emergency situations, such as an injury or accident, promptly.

As much as we would like to think otherwise, yachties are not infallible to diet-related health problems and, in fact, may even be more prone to them due to the stresses of hectic charter schedules,

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While heart attacks, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity are obvious signs of a poor diet, there are less obvious – but no less nefarious – signs as well. A diet lacking proper nutrition can impair cognitive performance, effect sleep patterns, create blood sugar imbalances, decrease muscle tissue, cause weight gain and raise blood pressure. This can mean slowed responsiveness to emergencies, moodiness, irritability, fatigue and depression. These are hardly the

rough passages, tight living quarters and demanding guests. When the body is under stress, it increases its release of a “stress hormone” called cortisol, which increases the body's cravings for foods high in fat, sugar and salt. These and any highly processed foods containing synthetic additives, stabilisers or flavour enhancers are difficult for the body to process and add additional stress. This creates a vicious cycle by actually causing the body to release more cortisol, further increasing its stress level. Prolonged, elevated levels of stress, multiplied by poor eating habits, can seriously impact one's performance on a daily basis and lead to serious illness and long-term disease.

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While unhealthy foods increase stress and can break the body down, healthy foods provide energy to last throughout the day and help build the body up in order to better process and handle the pressures and strains of yacht life. Foods rich in vitamin C, such as blueberries, broccoli and red peppers, help boost the immune system and slow the absorption of fat. Additionally, whole grains like wild rice, faro (spelt) and quinoa are high in protein, B-complex vitamins and complex carbohydrates, providing the body with a steady supply of energy throughout a long day.

Preparing healthy food is all well and good; however, as Julian Hewitt, chef of MY *Cyan* points out, “In the end, I can’t eat it for them.” Hewitt, who describes his cooking as “moderately healthy” and focuses more on what the crew likes, rather than prescribing a specific diet, says there is always a healthy choice at the table but quite often it is this item on the table that is left over. When it comes to cooking and eating healthily, Hewitt says, “Most of us are smarter about what we eat these days, and in this business we are very lucky to get the best of everything. Eating well is, therefore, the same as eating healthily – good ingredients, treated simply”.

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Good ingredients treated simply sounds easy enough; nevertheless, take away the mashed potatoes, pasta and butter and you just might have a mutiny on your hands. So, how do you strike a balance when planning crew meals? Allman enrolled in a healthy cooking class at her alma mater, the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, where she learned how to prepare healthy food without sacrificing flavour. She learned different cooking techniques such as steaming with wine, rather than frying; replacing butter with olive oil; and how to

use healthy grains and pulses. Now, she views each meal as a buffet of different foods, providing the salads and vegetables that the girls crave, along with the healthy protein and carbohydrate-rich options that will keep the deck crew going. Knowing that variety is the spice of life, Hewitt leaves the shepherd’s pie and lasagne for the weekend. Allman has “Junk Food Fridays” where she cooks burgers, pizzas, and anything the crew requests, alongside the salads and vegetable dishes. “I can’t force the crew not to raid the candy stock, but I can provide healthy alternatives,” Allman says.

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Nobody can force eating habits upon another person and every chef has their chosen style; however the yacht chef is in a unique and influential position because a majority of the time the crew rely solely on the chef for their sustenance. So, just as the captain is responsible for the safety of the crew, the chef is, in part, responsible for ensuring

that the crewmembers have available to them the foods that they need to stay healthy and maintain the energy required to do their jobs fully. This means understanding that while the deck crew may need lots of protein- and carbohydrate-rich foods to sustain them during heavy, physical activity such as a boat wash down or water activities with guests; the interior crew need lighter fare to keep them on their feet and not feeling weighed down.

Like Allman, consider limiting fried or

heavier foods to the weekend or make Friday “junk food” day, while cooking lighter the rest of the week. Make sure that there are plenty of dark, leafy greens on the table. Whether served raw in salads, steamed or stewed, leafy greens are one of the most concentrated sources of nutrition of any of the vegetables, packed with iron and vitamin C. In the Caribbean, there are wonderful dark leafy greens at the farmers’ markets around the islands, including callaloo, kale and water spinach. They are also rich in necessary vitamins and minerals that help keep the mind alert and include plenty of phytonutrients, which protect our cells against the oxidative effects of ageing and help protect against certain types of cancer and disease. Instead of tea-time cakes and cookies try juicing or making smoothies for the crew. Frozen blueberries or fresh mango pureed with yoghurt and

a banana will provide loads of vitamin C and protein and make for a good burst of energy. Experiment with different whole grains, such as wild rice or wheat berries, in salads and pilafs, alongside the mashed potatoes. Grains and pulses are easy to prepare and are loaded with antioxidants, magnesium, iron, and fibre. Simply steaming vegetables, rather than boiling, helps retain their vitamins. Toss them with olive oil, salt, pepper and a squeeze of fresh lemon, rather than slathering them in butter.

As yacht chefs we are responsible for all of the crewmembers’ meals. Because of this, we have a greater responsibility to provide healthy options for the crew than a restaurant chef. We cannot eat for the crew, but we hold a lot of power over what is and is not available to them by how we cook and what we provide. With a few simple changes to our cooking habits we can ensure that crewmembers have a long, healthy, sustainable career on a yacht... or whether they take an early departure. ■

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