

INSIDE TODAY

FOOD & DRINK

## Trendy!

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OPEN ROAD

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AGONY UNCLE

Richard Madeley is here to help

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PEOPLE WATCHING

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# Saturday

The great British weekend starts here



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HEATHCLIFF O'MALLEY FOR THE TELEGRAPH

# Fuel for life: eat your way to endless energy

What can top athletes teach the rest of us about healthy eating? **Jonny Cooper** receives a performance plan from sports nutritionist James Collins

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FELIX 03

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VIRGINIA 01



# COVER STORY

**T**he fruits of James Collins's labour as a nutritionist are plain to see on the very first page of his new book, *The Energy Plan*. It lists praise from former colleagues – and the names on the page would likely make most nutritionists drool. There's Arsène Wenger, who recruited Collins as head nutritionist at Arsenal football club in 2010, extolling his "pioneering use of food as fuel"; and Professor Greg Whyte OBE (the sports science guru who masterminded Comic Relief challenges by David Walliams and Eddie Izzard) enthusing that "there is no one better to de-bunk nutrition myths"; and England midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain attesting that he had "so much more energy" after heeding Collins's plan.

It's enough to send butterflies rippling through my stomach because, today, Collins is coming over to take a look at the contents of my kitchen cupboards. The man who cut his teeth working with Team GB athletes like Christine Ohuruogu, and England footballers like Wayne Rooney, is about to chew through my decidedly average eating habits.

"Pro athletes are not a different species from the rest of us," he assures me, five minutes after I've opened the front door while chewing on a chocolate Hobnob. "They're people who use food to achieve optimal performance. And those principles apply to everyone."

In essence, that's the central tenet of *The Energy Plan*, which takes the knowledge that Collins has gleaned through his work with leading sportsmen and women and opens it up to the masses. If they can use food as a tool to maximise their energy, then so can you and I.

"People are afraid of the word 'performance,'" says Collins. "But all of us, whether we call it performance or not, want to do better at work and be better at home. We want to live longer, more productive lives. We can use nutrition as a key driver to get there. The book is just establishing the role of food as fuel. It's showing people that what you eat directly affects your performance."

Collins says he first properly understood the profun-



**FOOD FOR THE FAST**  
Nutritionist James Collins has worked with footballers like Wayne Rooney and athlete Christine Ohuruogu, below left



He was a guinea pig in a trial that aimed to test the interplay between food and performance by giving subjects a "blind" meal before completing two 90-minute fitness tests. "In the first test, I was given a portion of food that didn't contain much carbohydrate – much energy. I felt bad during the test, and awful afterwards."

"The next week, we did the cross-over and I had a high-carb meal. The results were night and day. I was gliding along. I could have gone past 90 minutes. The different fuel really affected how I felt and performed."

Of course, if the answer to feeling more energetic was as simple as eating carbs (bread, pasta, potatoes) all day, we'd all run like Duracell bunnies and McDonald's wouldn't have to justify its fare. The truth is more complicated. Carbs may give us energy, but only in the short term – and if we fail to burn them off they get converted into fat. This is a primary reason why 62 per cent of adults are overweight.

Our bodies need different types of fuel. The short energy burst provided by carbs isn't enough to power us all day every day: for that, we also need fat (olive oil, fish, nuts), which is a longer-

and a panoply of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals that we mainly get from plants), which protects us from atrophy and disease.

*The Energy Plan* is Collins's guide to using these fuels for performance – whether you're an elite athlete, an office worker, or happily retired. First you ascertain your goal – do you want to feel more energetic at work, lose some weight, run a 5k faster, travel better or live longer – and then you use an approach he calls the TTA model, whereby you look at the Type of food you eat, the Timing of when you eat it,

**'You need to eat differently if you're sitting at your desk all day or out training'**

and the Amount of food on your plate. Collins says these are the core principles of performance nutrition. He calls them our "Big Rocks".

To get your rocks in place, Collins encourages you to plan what you eat days in advance, which shouldn't be beyond any of us. "We have a real disconnect in the UK because at work we're good at planning. We have Outlook calendars to arrange our meetings, and we're swimming in



## THE KITCHEN-CUPBOARD ASSESSMENT

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAMY FOR THE TELEGRAPH