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# Sumo Lifestyle

The sumo lifestyle requires strict discipline and devotion. By the time they are 15 years old, most novices enter a "stable" run by retired top wrestlers, who provide training, guidance and wisdom. A stable's income rises in accordance with the success of its wrestlers, so stable masters are invested in training their protégés well.

Young wrestlers are only given room and board at the stable and have no additional income. Nearly all their time is devoted to training for the sport and preparing for competition. Daily practices begin at 4:30 a.m. Currently, there are about 800 *rikishi*, or wrestlers, in the professional sumo world, from the youngest trainees to the top champion, or *yokozuna*.

Sumo wrestlers bulk up with a diet that is heavy in protein and rice. The traditional sumo stew, *chanko nabe*, is composed of fatty pork, cabbage, eggs and bean sprouts. Wrestlers gorge themselves after morning practice, followed with a nap (to ensure slow digestion) and then again at dinner.

There are six 15-day-long sumo Grand Tournaments held in Japan each year, during the odd-numbered months. Each wrestler in the top divisions fights once every day, with a different opponent. After each tournament, they are either promoted or demoted on the *banzuke*, or ranking list, depending on their performance. The Japan Sumo Association then issues a new official *banzuke*, printed in an ancient form of calligraphy.

Sumo is mental as well as physical: the goal is to break your opponent's concentration and either make him fall or force him out of the *dohyo*, or ring. But even if a wrestler touches the ground with any part of his body but his feet, he loses the match. It is against the rules to use fists, pull hair, or grab any part of the band covering the wrestler's stomach. Tripping, slapping and pushing are common techniques and bouts are generally short, lasting only seconds or a few minutes at the very most. In Japan, sumo wrestlers are given celebrity treatment and are closely followed by the media.




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