



NUTRITION

A well-balanced diet is very important to the athlete. It provides an adequate source for energy for play and nutrition for optimal growth and development. In this section, we want to cover the major points you need to know to fuel your performance on the field. And please remember, children and adolescents have much greater nutritional needs. These young athletes need a proper diet for growth and development as well as performance.

The Importance of a Well-balanced Diet:

The body needs 6 basic nutrients for daily living: Carbohydrates, Protein, Fats, Vitamins, Minerals, Water. The key is knowing how to get the proper balance of these elements to maximize your energy and enhance your performance. For any activity **the body prefers to use carbohydrates for energy**. You have probably heard of “**carb loading**” the night before a competition.

Let's take a look at the various components of a well-balanced diet.

Pre-Game Meals

- Pre-game meals serve two purposes: to prevent athletes from feeling hungry before or during activity AND to supply fuel to the muscles during training and competition.
- Ideally this meal should consist of something that is easily digested and quickly emptied from the stomach, **low in fat and protein and high in carbohydrates**.
- The goal for pre-event eating is to boost liver glycogen stores (which are broken down into usable energy), prevent low blood sugar, and to hydrate the body's fluid systems.

Time-specific Pre-Game Meals

EARLY MORNING EVENT

The night before the event you should eat a high-carbohydrate meal. (For example: pasta, potatoes, rice dishes, carrots, peas or corn, whole wheat bread, lemonade, and angel food cake.) Drink several glasses of water before and after the meal. Walk or stretch before bedtime. The morning of the event, eat a light breakfast. (For example: Cheerios with skim milk and juice; or a liquid pre-event meal such as Exceed or Gatorade.) Slowly drink several glasses of water. Allow 2 to 3 hours for food to digest.

EARLY AFTERNOON EVENT

The night before the event you should eat a high carbohydrate snack before bedtime. (For example: oatmeal cookies and juice.) The morning of the event you should eat a substantial brunch (bagels,

cereal, fruit, and juice) or have a big breakfast and a light lunch. Increase fluids gradually during the morning until noontime.

EARLY EVENING EVENT

The night before the event eat a favorite high-carbohydrate meal and have a good night's sleep. The day of the event, both breakfast and lunch will be completely digested by evening. A light carbohydrate meal should be eaten 3 hours before the event. (For example: sandwich, soup and juice.) Drink fluids all day.

ALL DAY EVENTS

The day before the event, cut back on exercise, rest and eat carbohydrate-rich meals and snacks all day. Drink plenty of fluids. The day of the event, eat the largest, best tolerated carbohydrate-rich breakfast possible. (Example: pancakes and hot cereal, or sip carbohydrate-rich fluids, such as Gatorade.) Eat a low-fat lunch. Drink fluids throughout the day, and snack on orange slices, fig bars, favorite juices and fruits. You will not starve during competition but you will become dehydrated and glycogen depleted. Your pre-event eating should aid you in preventing these conditions. Keep favorite foods handy for travel and emergencies and never try anything new before competition.

After the Game

Eating carbohydrate-rich foods and drinking extra fluids to maintain hydration are vital. Avoid alcohol and caffeine. The main purpose is to rehydrate yourself and to replace glycogen in the muscles. The first two hours after competition are the most crucial. Eat at least 400 carbohydrate calories or 100 grams of carbohydrate. (Example: 3 cups of oatmeal, 3/4 cup of raisins, 3 large oranges or 3 2-ounce slices of toast, 3 cups of fruit salad, or 6 large oatmeal cookies.) Protein and carbohydrate snacks like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches replenish carbohydrates efficiently. After an event the athlete often experiences fatigue and does not feel like eating or drinking. After a cool down period with fluids being sipped gradually and consistently the athlete can then eat and drink whatever sounds good.

SNACKS for Healthy Play

Snacks are important since practice and games often fall between meals. Just as with good meal choices, choose snacks from various food groups that will give some immediate energy and nutrition.

- Fresh fruits and juices
- Raw vegetables and low-fat dips
- Crackers
- Plain unsalted popcorn
- Protein bars & Granola bars
- Plan snacks to help you meet the recommended daily portions of the food pyramid.

Eating Between Games

When playing two games in a day, such as at tournaments, stay away from traditional fast food with burgers and fried foods. This food (proteins and fats) will not digest well and be heavy in your stomach for your second game. Stick to carbohydrate-rich foods such as fruits, sandwiches with a little meat, or pasta. Above all, get well hydrated between games!