

Extension

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Keep your Young Athlete Nourished and Hydrated!

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The foods we eat affect our energy levels and overall health. For young athletes, this is a special consideration as it affects their performance. They are still growing and have increased energy needs.

Nutrition should be a priority of any child's sports training. What they eat will affect their performance and overall health.

It is important that a child eats a well-balanced diet including carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Many young athletes do not consume adequate iron and calcium. Eating a variety of foods from a variety of food groups will help your child get what they need.

Don't forget about staying hydrated! Children are at a higher risk for dehydration. A child athlete should aim to stay hydrated all day long. Not only should fluids be consumed before an activity, but also during the activity especially on hot days, and also after the activity. Water is great. Drinking slowly rather than gulping can help the body absorb it more easily.

Guidelines for Young Athletes (Please remember to always contact your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.)

- **Carbohydrates** - provide the majority of our body's energy requirements. During digestion, our body breaks down carbs into glucose and stores it in our muscles as glycogen. While exercising, glycogen turns back into glucose and is used for energy. For example, soccer players need to eat a high carb diet 2-3 days before a game, so that the muscles and liver will store the amount of glycogen needed to sustain enough energy for a 90+ minute game. Young athletes should aim to get about 50% of their calories per day from carbohydrates.
- **Fat** - provides some energy and is needed for adolescent growth. Fatty foods can slow digestion, so should be avoided a few hours before exercising, yet consumed in advance of the activity. Children should choose foods that are high in heart healthy fats such as nuts, nut butters, seeds and avocados. Young athletes should try to get about 20-35% of their calories per day from fats.
- **Protein** - is important for muscle building and repair that takes place after exercise. Great sources are fish, lean meats and poultry, eggs, dairy, nuts/nut butter, and soy.
- **Vitamins & Minerals** - Iron can be found in lean red meats, grains that are fortified with iron, green leafy vegetables, and other vegetables. Calcium builds strong bones and



- protects against stress fractures. Dairy foods such as low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese are great sources.
- **Fluids** - Water is the drink of choice. One way to determine level of hydration is to look at the color of urine. Well hydrated individuals will have urine of a light pale yellow to clear (color of lemonade).

Healthy Eating Patterns

2-3 hours before - Eat a pre-game meal - A pre-game meal should include more carbohydrates, as they are more quickly and easily digested than protein or fat. Include complex carbs such as a plate of pasta, rice, whole grain bread, potatoes, vegetables, plus some protein. Don't stuff yourself. Drink Fluids: .5 – 1 liter (2 to 4 cups)

- **1-2 hours before - Eat a pre-game snack (optional)** - Fresh fruit, crackers, whole grain bread. Very light meal, if needed. Drink Fluids: .5 – 1 liter
- **0-1 hour before - AVOID FOOD** Drink Fluids: .5 – 1 liter
- **During Event or Training** - Eat juicy fruits with high water content: orange, melon slices or grapes. Drink Fluids: .5 – 1 liter
- **0-1 hour after - Eat a post-game snack** - Include some carbohydrates and some protein. Some examples include chocolate milk, toast with peanut butter, apples and cheese, or a turkey sandwich. Any snack is better than nothing! Drink Fluids: 2 liters over several hours

Let's Talk

There is a golden opportunity here! Players that eat and drink properly have an edge over their competition, especially in the second half of the game, the second game of the day, or the second half of the season. Talking with your child/children, other parents, and even coaches about sports nutrition offers a gateway to education and improves lifelong eating habits.

New on the rehydration scene: Coconut water.

We know of no studies done on young athletes and coconut water. The carbohydrate concentration of pure coconut water is between 2%-5%, falling in the appropriate range. Coconut water is an acceptable choice if the young athlete drinks more fluid because they like the taste. Remember to check the product label and ingredient list to find out additional ingredients added.

Recipe for Success: Homemade Lime Boost

Concentrate Ingredients: 2 cups lime juice, and 1 cup sugar

1. Put lime juice and sugar in pan over low heat. Let mixture warm until it thickens slightly and all sugar is dissolved (about 10 minutes). Remove from heat and let cool.
2. Pour into clean jar with lid and store in refrigerator. Makes 2 cups of Lime Boost concentrate

To make Sports Drink:

Add 1/8 tsp. salt and 2 tablespoons of concentrated Lime Boost to 1 quart of water

Resources:

American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org

American College of Sports Medicine, www.acsm.org

