

Sports Nutrition and Hydration for Children & Adolescents

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Where shall we begin? First, it's great that your kids are physically active and participate in sports! However, keeping their bodies well-fueled and hydrated are important for physical activity and recovery afterwards. Your recreational athletes do not require special sports supplements! It starts with eating at least three meals each day!

Let's start with your kids' eating habits. Answer the following questions:

- Do they eat at least three meals a day?
- Do they eat breakfast?
- Do they eat fruit every day?
- Do they eat vegetables every day?
- Do they drink water instead of soda?
- Do they avoid fried foods?

If you answered yes to each of these questions, then your kids have some good dietary habits.

Practice makes perfect. Well, while that is certainly true for the actual "game," the same can be said about the foods and fluids your kids consume. I am suggesting that kids practice their eating on the days they have practice, and try to maintain the same approach on game day. Think of your body as a car – cars need gas for fuel, oil and even water to run smoothly. You need to eat adequate carbohydrates, protein and fat in order to get you through the day and sustain you through recreational activities!

No matter how tempting it can be, getting fuel from foods – not from bars, shakes and other products is best for the body. First, consider energy dense foods – not foods that are going to feel heavy in your stomach - but those foods that are loaded up with vitamins, minerals, fiber, carbohydrates, protein and fat! Second, make sure you have variety in the foods that you eat. All calories are not created equal. Junk food, candy bars and fried foods before practice are not going to help you run, jump or tackle as well as wholesome foods.

Carbohydrates are the varsity fuel for athletes. They can be found in foods that contain bread, rice, cereal, pasta, dairy, fruits and vegetables. Fats are the fuel that gets you through the endurance of training, practice and game day! Fats can be found in foods that are dairy, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans, avocados

and coconuts! Fried foods, oils, mayonnaise, salad dressings and junk food are also sources of fat! Protein is necessary for muscle structure, along with repair and renewal! The building blocks of protein are called amino acids and they can be found in dairy, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans, dairy, vegetables and grains (bread, rice, cereal and pasta).

Another important aspect of fueling your body is timing of nutrient intake. When did you last eat in relation to engaging in physical activity? Eating at least three good, balanced meals every day is a great start. Don't skip meals – especially breakfast! An ideal situation would be the opportunity to eat at least one to two hours before practice or games.

Any foods that are solids vs. liquids, need to be consumed at least an hour before you play. After your practice or game, it is vital for recovery and repair that you consume a well-balanced meal as soon as possible.

Foods that pack a lot of energy and make great snacks:

Grains	Low-fat, whole grain crackers, rice cakes, whole wheat pita, baked tortilla chips, pretzels, granola bars, graham crackers, whole grain cereal, popcorn, rice carks, whole grain cereal
Vegetables	Raw vegetables, salads, potatoes & sweet potatoes, vegetable juice (100%), dried veggies, vegetable soups
Fruits	Fresh fruit, dried fruit, fruit juice (100%), apple sauce, fruit cocktail
Heart Healthy Protein	Nuts & nut butters, bean dip, bean soup, tuna in water, baked tofu, bean salad, turkey & chicken breast, low sodium ham, eggs (hard boiled), hummus
Heart Healthy Dairy	Non-fat/light yogurt, fortified soymilk and skim milk, smoothies made with soy or skim milk, string cheese, fat-free pudding (made from milk)

As for hydration, the human body is approximately 70 percent water. Water is essential for not only transporting substances throughout the body, but it is critical for maintaining fluid balance, heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature. You may have heard about the importance of electrolytes in sports drinks... don't worry, you are not going to get a battery in your sports bottle. Instead, you are going to get sodium and potassium which are essential to maintaining fluid balance in the body.

So, how much water do you need to consume? Well, fluid intake, from predominantly water, should be equal to any losses of fluids. Drinking at least 6-8

cups of water each day is a good start, along with eating fruits with water! When the weather is hot and humid, you definitely need more fluid!

Drink at least 8 ounces of water (1 cup) at least half an hour before practice or a game. It is important that adequate amounts of cold water be available during practice and games. Do not rely on your thirst mechanism to tell you that you need to drink more water... try to have four to eight ounces every 20 minutes. For physical activity that lasts more than an hour, turn to sports beverages as they can be beneficial because they provide water, electrolytes and carbohydrates (in the form of sugar/glucose). The greatest aspect about these beverages is in the flavor because it disguises the salty taste! The science supports water, electrolyte and carbohydrate replenishment. Sports drinks with artificial sweeteners: Splenda or Equal (listed in the ingredient list as sucralose, aspartame, or acesulfame potassium) taste "sweet" but do not provide the needed carbohydrates necessary to replenish depleted stores and do not belong in kids' diets at all.

A favorite "snack" to keep on the sidelines are pretzels because they provide carbohydrates, sodium and probably will need to wash them down with water! Apples and oranges make great snacks as well! As tempting as it may be to bring out the "junk" snacks after practice or games – remember, kids will participate in sports for the fun of it – not because we are rewarding them with unhealthy food.