

Nutrition for Optimal Performance



Q: What should I eat before a game?

A: Prior to game time, an athlete's meal should aim to provide energy and ensure hydration. It is well known that athletes should make sure they take in adequate carbohydrates 3-4 hours before game time in order to have proper energy to play well. Eating complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, starchy vegetables and legumes will provide athletes with sufficient energy for a longer period of

time. It is also important to make sure these meals are low in fat. Foods that are high in fat stay in the stomach longer and therefore, blood flow to the muscles will be restricted because the body will be focused on digestion instead of athletic performance.

Examples of pre-game meals include: Eggs with toast, turkey sandwich with fruit, or whole-wheat pasta with a tomato based sauce.

Q: Should I drink water or Gatorade?

A: The answer to this question depends on the intensity and length of the activity. Research has shown that Gatorade is beneficial once physical activity exceeds 90 minutes. Considering most soccer games only last 90 minutes, water is perfectly

fine. However, if athletes find themselves in a tournament where they play 2 or maybe 3 games a day, Gatorade will help replenish the energy and minerals lost through vigorous exercise.

Regardless, it is important to stay hydrated to make sure our bodies function properly. Although it is difficult to determine how much water is needed for each athlete, half a liter an hour before game time, with 200 milliliters every 15 minutes is a good starting point. It is also important to avoid caffeine to prevent further unnecessary dehydration.



Q: What should I eat after the game?

A: It is always important to eat a post-game meal to restore what was lost or used during competition. Because the game is over, the meals can include a variety of foods, as they will not affect performance directly. However, eating a balanced meal will ensure an athlete's body will recover well and properly.

Moderate to high glycemic carbohydrates such as breads, starchy vegetables, rice, cereals and some fruits are excellent to replenish energy stores quickly. Protein should also be included, as it will aid tissue repair and muscle development. If post-game meals are neglected, the body will begin to break down the body's muscle tissue in order to produce fuel.



Q: What if I'm a Vegetarian?

A: Vegetarians especially need to make sure they are making the right

choices as they often lack protein in their diet. Some of the best protein sources for vegetarians include quinoa, beans, lentils, legumes, tofu and other soy based products. Studies have also shown that vegetarians lack a number of nutrients (zinc, vitamin B12, vitamin D and calcium) that are mainly found in animal products. Thankfully, these nutrients can also be found in many suitable vegetarian foods such as fortified soymilk and whole grain cereals.

Q: As a young soccer player, what should I pay attention to?

A: Not only is nutrition important for optimal performance and energy balance, it is also vital in regards to proper growth and development throughout youth and adolescence. Recent studies have shown that high amount of youth athletes were not in energy balance, meaning their energy expenditure was higher than their caloric intake. While none were at severe health risks, most failed to meet acceptable carbohydrate requirements. Micronutrients

including calcium, vitamin D, E and iron were also lacking in the majority of athlete's diets.



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It is also important to remember that all athletes are different and may require different foods or have different needs. Always pay attention to your own body and how it responds to certain foods and nutrition plans to get the most out of your performance.

