

Basketball: Better Nutrition = Better Hoops

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Basketball is a highly intense sport that requires its players to have speed, agility and power throughout the game. The peak energy level needed for basketball can be maximized with good hydration and nutrition pre- and post-court.

Promote Hydration – “The 3 Pointer”

A common cause of early fatigue during exercise is dehydration. Each athlete should have his or her own individual sports bottle. Cool, flavored fluids, like sports drinks, encourage drinking and help athletes replenish fluid losses. Dehydration can be prevented by using these guidelines from the National Athletic Trainers' Association:

Hydration Guidelines

Point 1: Pre-Court

- ✓ Drink 17 to 20 oz of fluid 2 to 3 hours prior to playing
- ✓ Drink another 7 to 10 oz fluid 10 to 20 minutes before playing
- ✓ Record baseline weight to assess fluid losses

Point 2: On the Court

- ✓ Drink at least 7 to 10 oz of fluid every 10 to 15 minutes

Point 3: Post-Court

- ✓ Record post-exercise weight to assess fluid losses
- ✓ Within 2 hours of finishing training or competition, drink at least 20 oz for every 1lb. of weight loss

Pre-Court Fuel

Basketball players need guidance on what to eat before they train or compete. The pre-event meal is important because it keeps the athletes from feeling hungry, helps the athlete prepare mentally for competition and provides fuel and fluids to the muscles. Each athlete needs to experiment to identify what foods feel best, both physiologically and psychologically. Here are a few tips to consider when planning a pre-event meal:

- ✓ Eat familiar foods. Never try a new food on a game day. Experiment with foods only on practice days.
- ✓ Athletes should try to eat 2 to 4 hours before the game to give their body enough time to digest the food. The closer the athlete eats to a game or practice, the smaller the meal should be.
- ✓ Consume high-carbohydrate foods. Good choices include whole-grain bagels, breads, fruits and energy bars, like the Gatorade Energy Bar. These foods tend to be easily digested by most athletes.
- ✓ If an athlete tends to experience stomach problems, eating smaller, more frequent meals will help. Some athletes tolerate liquid meals, such as nutrition shakes, better than solid foods.
- ✓ For staying power, include some protein-containing foods with the high-carbohydrate foods at the pre-event meal. Examples include slices of turkey, chicken, lean beef, fish, yogurt, beef or turkey jerky or nuts.

Once the athlete has finished their pre-game meal, they should sip fluids during the period leading up to the game to help ensure they begin play well hydrated.

Recovering From The Court

High-carbohydrate foods are essential for replenishing muscle energy stores after practice or a game. Carbohydrate-rich foods along with some protein must be consumed within 30 minutes after a practice or a game.

Along with fuel, fluids must also be replaced post-exercise. Ideally, athletes will weigh in and out pre- and post-exercise. Research suggests that 20 oz of fluids per 1 pound of weight lost due to sweat needs to be consumed to get the player back to baseline. Adopting these two simple post-exercise recovery strategies will help maximize the ability for the athlete to train and compete at his or her best.