

Football: Fueling for the Season

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Football is a game of strength, speed and skill – all of which can be affected by what, when and how much an athlete eats and drinks. Athletes need to apply the same effort to proper fueling as they give during practices and competition. Players sometimes neglect nutrition, which can result in poor performance.

Common Nutrition Mistakes

- ✓ Not drinking enough fluids
- ✓ Not eating at regular intervals
- ✓ Eating too much protein and short-changing carbohydrates

Setting Nutrition Goals

With a little education, football players can make changes that will be felt both on and off the field. The team should set nutrition goals together, such as:

- ✓ Drinking on a schedule
- ✓ Refueling at half-time
- ✓ Eating immediately after practices or games

What to Eat

Football players need carbohydrate to fuel hard-working muscles. Bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, fruits and vegetables should be the bulk of a football player's diet filling up 2/3 of the plate at every meal. Protein foods, such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, nuts, soy products and beans, are essential for good health, but are not the primary fuel source for exercise, and so should occupy only 1/3 of the plate.

All Day Fueling

Unlike professional football players who practice during the day, younger athletes don't take the field or hit the gym until after school. Since bodies don't run well on empty, eating every 3 to 4 hours is necessary to properly fuel both the body and mind. Encourage your athletes to:

- ✓ Eat within 1 hour of waking up.
- ✓ Eat something at lunch.
- ✓ Snack before practice on a sports drink, energy bar, cereal or granola bar.
- ✓ Bring a post-exercise snack to eat before leaving the locker room. Good choices include an energy bar, bagel, crackers or fruit with a sports drink.

Drink Up!

All players benefit when the body is optimally hydrated. This is not just a game-day issue, but a daily priority. To prevent dehydration, especially in hot, humid environments, athletes need to drink often and enough. Get your athletes off to the right start:

- ✓ Recommend sports drinks over water, because sports drinks taste great, contain electrolytes, like sodium, and may help prevent cramping.
- ✓ Weigh players before and after practices to determine individual fluid losses and monitor them to replace every pound lost by drinking at least 20 ounces of fluid.
- ✓ Ask athletes to bring their own sports bottles and drinks so their favorite fluid is readily available.
- ✓ Remind athletes that spitting out fluids doesn't hydrate the body!
- ✓ Educate players about the importance of seeing what they pee. The goal is light-colored urine and lots of it!