

# SPORTS NUTRITION

## For The Youth Athlete

### Introduction

As a student athlete, you've probably gone to practice or a game with a rumbling, empty stomach. You might not realize this, but eating right before practices and on game day is your secret weapon for top-notch performance, whatever your sport. While training and skill are important, your body's fuel matters, too. That's why you need a nutrition game plan. Here are the basics of what you should know about eating to fuel your body for competition.



### Breakfast: Don't Skip It!

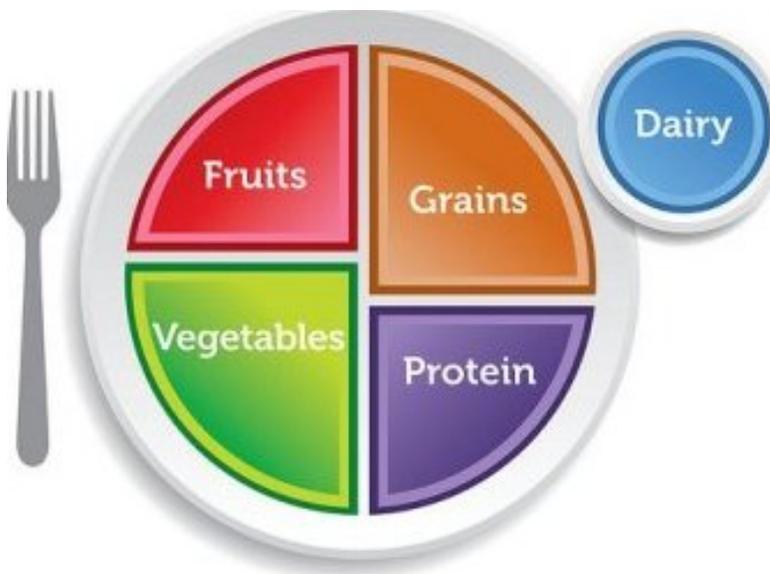
The first meal of the day shouldn't be one you skimp on. Eating the right kinds of food first thing in the morning can set up the rest of your day for success. Your breakfast should include carbohydrates, nutrients that your body utilizes for energy, such as whole-wheat bread or cereal. Whole-wheat is important because it is packed with more nutrients than white breads and more processed cereals. Breakfast should also include a source of protein such as eggs, yogurt or milk. Examples of good breakfast choices are oatmeal with milk, egg sandwich, and smoothie with yogurt, milk and fruit.

### Nutrients for Energy

As mentioned earlier carbohydrates are one of the main sources your body uses to produce energy. Carbohydrates include whole-grain bread, crackers, cereal and pasta. Another good source of energy for youth athletes are healthy fats. Adolescents utilize more fat for energy than do adults. Healthy fats include olive oil, nuts, peanut butter, avocado, and fish such as salmon and tuna.

### Protein to Rebuild

Muscles love protein. It helps them stay strong, recover from intense exercise and build more muscle over time. Young athletes should spread protein foods throughout the day, having some at each meal and with most snacks, such as deli meat on a sandwich at lunch or an egg with breakfast. Young athletes need more protein to sustain growth. Recommendations are to intake up to 1.5g per kilogram of body weight every day. Suggested foods are: two to three servings of meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, peas, and nuts, three servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese, protein shakes.



## Balance

Taking in a good balance of nutrients will ensure that the body is able to grow and recover properly. Athletes are able to recover from injury more quickly when a proper diet is being followed. Deficits in any one nutrient category can have detrimental effects of performance and growth. Listed below are the daily recommendations for each food group.

- Fruit: 1 ½ - 2 cups
- Vegetables: 2 ½ - 3 cups
- Grains: 6oz – 8oz
- Meats/Protein: 5oz – 6 ½oz
- Dairy: 3 cups
- Oils/Fats: 5tsp – 6tsp

Intake does not need to be exact. As long as you are eating a good balance every day, nutrient deficiencies should not be an issue.

## Timing

When you eat is just as important as what you eat. Your body needs **two to three hours** to digest a **regular meal** such as breakfast or lunch before competition, while a **small snack** such as a granola bar can be eaten **30 minutes** to an hour before competition. Here's good advice for eating before a competition: load up at meals but don't overeat, and keep snacks light as you get closer game time. The bigger pre-game meals should consist of large amounts of carbohydrates accompanied by proteins. Hydration should be maintained in the days leading up to competition in order to receive the greatest benefit.

## Hydration

Dehydration is a recipe for poor performance. It can put you at a higher risk of experiencing heat illness and cramping. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water during the day leading up to a game, especially in the two to three hours before game time. Continue to drink during the game) and afterward to rehydrate after sweat loss. Kids aged 9-18 should intake 10-14 cups of water per day. Some of that comes in the foods you eat but the majority should come from beverages. These recommendations should be increased when the child is involved in vigorous exercise.

Before Exercise: 16-20 ounces within the two-hour period prior to exercise.

During Exercise: 4-8 ounces every 15-20 minutes during exercise.

Post Exercise: Replace 24 ounces for every one pound of body weight lost during exercise.

While some sports drinks are effective during activity, they should be avoided when not actively participating in sports or athletic activities. The high sugar content can outweigh the benefits of the electrolytes also provided.

After activity, research has shown that a 16oz glass of chocolate milk can be more effective at rehydrating than Gatorade or other sports drinks. So after practice go grab a tall glass of chocolate milk! Who doesn't like chocolate milk?!

## Remember...

- **Avoid trans and saturated fats**
- **Avoid anything in excess (balance is key)**
- **Avoid soda (carbonated beverages), energy drinks, sugary juices**
- **Eating one good meal cannot make up for a whole week of poor nutrition**
- **Make it a habit!**
- **Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!**

## Resources for More Info

- ChooseMyPlate.gov
- sportsnutritionssociety.org
- eatright.org
- fnic.nal.usda.gov