

SPORTS NUTRITION FOR YOUTH SOCCER

A high-quality diet enhances performance on the field. Each nutrient in food has a specific job in nourishing the body – they are like team members, each with a role on the team. The 4 key areas to optimize your performance through nutrition are **HYDRATION, FUELING, TIMING and PRACTICE.**

1. HYDRATION ... HYDRATION ... HYDRATION



WATER is the most important fluid making up 60% of the body on average. Individual needs and tolerance to amounts and types of fluids vary and should be practiced. Use your weekly team practices to test your tolerance before you try this in a game.

WHEN	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
HOW MUCH	Start practice or a game well hydrated by drinking water throughout the day and approximately 8-20 ounces an hour before event.	Water needs are approximately 3-5 oz. every 15-20 minutes during practice or a game.	Replace fluids lost by drinking water or a sports drink immediately after practice and games. Approximately 12-24 ounces rehydrates.
TIPS	Check urine color- clear to light yellow indicates good hydration.	One gulp is roughly one ounce.	Use a sports drink such as Gatorade or PowerAde for activity longer than an hour or in extreme heat. Check urine-color.

Facts:

- If you are not hydrated properly, your endurance is compromised and your heart works harder.
- Thirst is not a good indicator of the need for fluids. If thirsty- your body's water is already low.
- A 1-2% drop in body water affects decision making, focus and memory. This can lead to trouble with performing basic tactics of the game.
- Sports drinks are typically not needed except after long or intense practices and games > 60 minutes or in extremely hot weather. Don't like sports drinks? Use water and a food with about 100-150mg. of sodium (most bars, pretzels plus fruit, milk or chocolate milk if tolerated).
- The color of your urine is one of the best indicators of how well hydrated you are. [Click here to check your urine](#)

2. FUEL EARLY- FUEL OFTEN- FUEL SMARTLY



Consuming adequate calories from carbohydrates, proteins and fats is the way the body gets energy or fuel. Soccer relies on carbs as the main fueling source. High quality nutrition is important all the time and eating frequently optimizes the way the body uses nutrients.

- Carbohydrate is the key **FUELING NUTRIENT!** Carbs supply immediate energy, maintain fuel reserves, and aid in recovery from a tough training. High quality sources are bread, pasta, rice, quinoa, oatmeal, white and sweet potatoes, most cereals, whole and dried fruit, 100% fruit juice, and milk/yogurt. Rely on these more complex forms of carbohydrate and less on simple forms such as sweets and soda.
- Protein is the **RECOVERY NUTRIENT.** While protein supports growth in your body and muscles, most youth soccer players get more than enough. What is most important is that your protein intake is spread throughout the day in all meals and some snacks, especially those snacks after training. High quality sources of protein are lean meats such as chicken, turkey, fish, lean cuts of pork and beef, tofu, low-fat milk, cheese/yogurt, beans, nuts and nut butters, and eggs.
- Fats are a secondary fueling nutrient and needed in high quality forms to meet energy needs in a healthy diet. High quality sources of fats include nuts, unsaturated oils such as olive and canola oil, avocados, and nuts and seeds.

WHEN	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
TYPE OF FOOD	Well balanced meal 3 hours prior to training "Top-off" with only carbohydrate as training gets closer ex. Fruit (any), bread, low sugar granola bar	Nutrients are typically not needed during a game. If intensity and duration are longer simple carbs from fruit or sports drinks at half-time will suffice	Within 30-60 minutes replenish with mostly carbs and smaller amounts of protein:
HOW MUCH	Until satisfied	Very small amounts as tolerated	8 oz. chocolate milk or smoothies Bar such as Clif Z, or other with ~5 grams of protein Banana/apple with peanut butter
TIPS	*see sample menus	Keep it simple	Provide on the field

Facts:

- Eating great before a game is important but research shows that it does not provide as many performance benefits as eating great Monday through Friday for practice.
- Choose whole grains by looking for the whole-grain ingredient as the first listed on the label

3. IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING



Refer to the above hydration and fueling tables for the basics on timing. Often, early morning games and back-to-back games do not leave enough time to use best practice guidelines. See the below scenarios to optimize performance.

Scenario 1: Back to Back Games /Tournament Play

- If there is less than 2.5 hours between games, having a full meal is not indicated. Continue to hydrate with water. Try one or more of these suggestions:
 - Half peanut butter and jam sandwich, fruit, yogurt or milk
 - Sports bar with at least 8 grams of protein and 30 grams of carbohydrate with fruit
 - 12 crackers with 2 cheese sticks, 100% fruit juice or sports drink
 - Yogurt and fruit with granola or cereal

Scenario 2: The 8am Game

- Arrive to breakfast between 5:30 and 6:00am. Choose mostly carbohydrates such as bread and bagels, lower sugar cereal with low fat milk, and fruit. Avoid high fat meats such as bacon and sausage. Choose a small amount of eggs instead. If the game starts at 9, still try to arrive to breakfast by 6:00am. Practice eating breakfast as soon as you wake up.

4. PRACTICE BEFORE YOU PLAY



- You put in hard work practicing the game. Proper hydration and fueling takes practice as well. Test your tolerance to the guidelines above during harder training days to assure new systems work for you. Trying something new the day of a big game is too risky!
- Once you find out what works for you, stick with it. While some athletes have “lucky meals” or pre-game food rituals that scientifically make no sense, the largest majority of successful athletes follow sound guidelines.

SAMPLE MEALS:

PRE-GAME/TRAINING MEAL	POST-GAME/TRAINING MEAL
1-1 ½ cups pasta with sauce	Baked or grilled fish or chicken (3 ounces)
2-3 ounces chicken (size of deck of cards)	Baked/sweet potato or 1-1.5 cups brown rice
Roll or slice of bread	1 cup mixed vegetables of choice
½- 1 cup broccoli or vegetable of choice	1cup low fat milk, soy milk, almond milk
1 cup low fat milk, soy milk, almond milk	
Turkey sandwich, fruit of choice	Same as Pre-Game Meal
1 cup soup, 3 fig bars or 1 oz. pretzels, milk	

References:

Fuel for Young Athletes by Ann Litt, MS, RD.

Hydration for the Child Athlete, Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutrition (SCAN)

Sports Nutrition for the Serious Youth Athlete by Jennifer Sacheck, PhD, FACSM

Information provided by the Registered Dietitian Nutritionists at the IU Health Center Bloomington, Indiana.