



8 Gameday Nutrition Tips for Young Athletes

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If you're a high school athlete, you've probably gone to practice or a game with a rumbling, empty stomach. You might not realize this, but eating right on gameday 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.

These nutrition tips will help you kick it into high gear on gameday – so you'll never miss a shot.

Eat a Good Breakfast

You've heard, "It's the most important meal of the day," right? Well it's true! Start the day with a breakfast containing carbs (such as whole-wheat bread or cereal) and a source of protein (such as eggs, yogurt or milk). Oatmeal made with milk; last night's dinner leftovers; an egg sandwich; or a smoothie made with fruit, yogurt and milk are all great breakfast choices.

Don't Light-Load or Skip Lunch

Many student athletes compete after school making lunch an essential fuel source for competition. Lunch should be hearty and represent as many food groups as possible, including whole grains, lean protein, fruit, vegetables and low-fat dairy. You might think opting for a light lunch such as a salad — or even skipping lunch altogether — will leave you light on your feet, but instead, it may leave your tank empty at game time.

Focus on Carbs for Energy

Choose whole-grain bread, crackers, cereal and pasta for lasting energy. Save the sports drinks for an energy boost during endurance sports or training sessions lasting more than an hour.

Spread out Protein Foods

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.

Use Caution with Fatty Foods

Fatty foods slow digestion, which is not ideal for the athlete facing a competition. Greasy, fried foods and fatty desserts are filling and may leave you tired and sluggish on the courts. Skip the french fries or pizza before competition, and keep the fat content on the light side.

Eat with Food Safety in Mind

Nothing is worse than food poisoning – having stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea after eating. Make sure you store snacks at proper temperatures to prevent spoilage. Keep cheese, yogurt, deli meats, eggs and salads made with mayonnaise in a refrigerator or cooler. Shelf-stable items such as nuts, granola bars and fresh fruit can be tossed into your duffel bag without a problem.

Flow with Fluids

Dehydration is a recipe for poor performance. 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 (about a 1/2 cup every 15 minutes) and afterward to rehydrate after sweat loss.

Timing Is Everything

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.

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