



Feeding Your Athlete

Children need to eat the right amount and mix of foods to support their growth and level of activity, but that might not be too different from a normal healthy diet.

When children use crash diets to lose weight, it will affect their strength, endurance and mental concentration. If the child wants to gain weight fast and starts overeating in an unhealthy way, the extra calories will be stored as fat instead of muscle and this will affect their physical fitness.

If a coach, gym teacher, or teammate wants your child to gain or lose weight, talk to your doctor. The doctor will work with your child or refer him/her to a dietitian to develop a plan that is safe and healthy.

CALORIES

Your athlete must get enough calories to maintain his growth and activity level. The number of calories will depend on the level and type of physical activity and their physical development.

Children and teens who are involved in all-day competitions or strenuous endurance sports (like rowing, cross-country running, or competitive swimming) that last for more than 1 ½ to 2 hours at a time, may need to eat more food to keep up with the increased energy needs.

CARBOHYDRATE

It is the most efficient fuel for athletic performance. The energy is released in the working muscle three times faster than energy from fat sources. Any extra energy not used is stored in the muscles and liver for the next time. Once the energy stores are used up, eating more carbohydrate will replenish the stores and ultimately improve endurance.

There is no need for "carb loading" (eating a lot of carbohydrates in advance of a big game), but make sure that their meals contain carbohydrates (whole grain foods, fruits, vegetables).

PROTEIN

Protein helps build, maintain, and repair muscles and other body tissues, but most of us get plenty of protein through a balanced diet. Strong muscles come from regular training and exercise.

Protein Supplements: Protein powder supplements are not needed and can lead to dehydration and calcium loss. A healthy athlete can get the protein that he or she need from regular foods.

FLUIDS

During exercise, body water is lost as sweat. Young athletes should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, which can affect strength, energy, and coordination.

Water is all that is needed for activities lasting less than 1 hour. For events lasting longer than 1 hour, a sport beverage is recommended to help replace electrolyte and carbohydrate losses.

Hydration Recommendations

Timing	Fluid Amount*
1-2 hours before the event	12-22 ounces cool water or sport drink
10-15 minutes before event	10- 20 ounces cool water or sport drink
During event	4-6 ounces cool water or sport drink every 15 minutes
After event	16-24 ounces cool fluids for every pound of weight loss

**The lower amounts are appropriate for younger children*

Signs of dehydration include the following:

- Dark urine or not urinating much
- Reduced sweating
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea or vomiting
- Chills or clammy skin
- Flushed face
- Dizziness and light headedness
- Headaches

Bottom Line: For most young athletes, water is the best choice for hydration. Carbohydrates and electrolytes can be replenished after the activity.

MEAL AND SNACK PLAN FOR ATHLETES

Timing	Meal/Snack	Examples
½-1 hour before event	Snack: small amount of carbohydrate; limited amount of fat	Pretzels and fluids
2-4 hours before event	Light meal: moderate amount of carbohydrate; small amount of fat; moderate protein	Turkey sandwich, pretzels, fruit, and fluids
4-5 hours before event	Heavy meal: generous amount of carbohydrates; moderate protein; moderate fat	Baked chicken, potatoes, fruit, bread, and fluids <i>or</i> Peanut butter sandwich, baked chips, fruit, and fluids
Within 2-4 hours after event	Sport drink or snack: generous amount of carbohydrates	Sports drink, lemonade, fruit, granola bar, or crackers

Additional Information:

If you have questions, call: _____, *Registered Dietitian*

Phone: (717) 531- _____ or (717) 531-8406