



GATORADE SPORTS SCIENCE INSTITUTE

NUTRITION FOR THE TEAM SPORT ATHLETE

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Competing in team sports requires dedication to teamwork, on and off the field. To work together, all team members must come to practices and competitions prepared to succeed. Choosing the right foods and fluids to prepare for competition and to provide proper energy during and after competition can make all the difference. No matter the sport, getting the sports nutrition advantage puts the team one step closer to the “W.”

FLUIDS: HYDRATION IS KEY

Water is an important part of the working body, making up 60 to 65 percent of total body weight.

- If athletes lose too much fluid in sweat without replacing what they've lost in both fluids and important electrolytes (like sodium and chloride), they risk becoming dehydrated.
- Dehydration can diminish energy and impair performance. Even a 2-percent loss of body weight through sweat (i.e. 3 1/2 pounds for a 180-pound player) can put athletes at a disadvantage.

HOW TO COMBAT DEHYDRATION

Athletes, especially those who train in hot and humid weather conditions or in hot gyms or training facilities, run a risk of dehydration. The risk becomes greater the longer an athlete practices or plays at one time, or when there is more than one competition in a day, such as a weekend basketball or tennis tournament, or two-a-day workouts. Dehydration can be prevented—here's how:

- **Stay well hydrated all day.** Start with extra fluids like milk and juice at breakfast. Then, drink fluids throughout the day, using water bottles, water fountains and cafeteria beverages as triggers for drinking. Soup and some water rich foods (like yogurt, watermelon, grapes and tomatoes) can also contribute to proper daily hydration.
- **Have a pre-game plan and hydrate 2 to 3 hours before practices and games.** Athletes should aim for at least 16 ounces (2 cups) of fluid at this time and an additional 8 ounces (1 cup) 10 to 20 minutes prior to playing.
- **Drink during workouts or games.** Sports drinks, like Gatorade, can help ward off dehydration and muscle cramps because they help replenish both fluid and electrolytes lost in sweat. Encourage sports drinks when workouts last an hour or longer, especially for heavy sweaters. Sports chews or gels can add an extra “energy boost” during intense activity.
- **Prioritize post-practice hydration.** Athletes should weigh themselves before and after activity and consume enough ounces of water, sports drinks or other fluids to replace what they've lost.

FOODS: PRE-WORKOUT FUEL

Athletes should fuel their bodies 3 to 4 hours before practices and games with a high-carbohydrate meal or snack (see “Pre-Workout Meal Ideas”). This will give the body enough energy to make it through the workout.

To do this:

- **Team leaders can organize pre-game meals** for the whole team 3 to 4 hours before competition, including high-energy foods like breads, bagels, cereals, pasta, potatoes, rice, fruits, fruit juices and vegetables—as well as lean sources of protein like chicken breast, turkey, lean deli meats, fish and yogurt. For quick energy, athletes should fill 2/3 of their plates with high carbohydrate options. Drink plenty of fluids with the meal to optimize hydration.

- **Players should eat foods they know work well for them pre-exercise.** Trying a variety of foods before workouts can help determine the best combinations for pre-game meals.
- **Athletes should not be afraid to salt food because they can lose lots of sodium** through sweating—especially if they're heavy crampers. Sometimes, that sodium loss can be the cause of cramping.

PRE-WORKOUT MEAL IDEAS

MENU #1	MENU #2	MENU #3
Pasta and red sauce	Turkey and cheese sandwiches	Baked chicken tenders
French bread	Bananas and orange slices	Mashed potatoes
Fresh fruit plate	Baked chips or pretzel chips	Green beans
Steamed vegetables	Cereal bars	Fruit and yogurt smoothies
Cookies		
Water, skim milk, fruit juice, and sports drinks	Water, skim milk, fruit juice, and sports drinks	Water, skim milk, fruit juice, and sports drinks

RECOVERY FOODS: POST-WORKOUT FUEL

To maximize the body's ability to refuel muscles after every workout, athletes should consume a “post-workout snack” as soon as possible after practice or games. This helps restock the muscle energy used in practices quickly.

Tips for Recovery:

- Have snacks like trail mix, sports chews and bars, cereal mixed with peanuts and raisins, chocolate milk or peanut butter and crackers within reach after workouts.
- Encourage athletes to eat a meal within 1-2 hours after workouts to continue muscle energy recovery.

LOCKER OR BACKPACK SNACKS

Many athletes run from school directly to practices, with limited time to get energy to working muscles before hitting the field or court. They often miss out on a high-energy snack to help boost energy for performance. To combat this, keeping easy-to-grab snacks in the locker or in the backpack is a must.

Quick locker or backpack snacks:

- Granola bars, cereal bars and sports bars
- Energy chews
- Trail mix
- Dry cereal and pretzels
- Pressed fruit or fruit rolls
- Juice boxes

There is research that supports that prioritizing nutrition on a daily basis can potentially enhance success for athletes. Make sports nutrition a priority for your teams and you'll see the difference.