

Sports Nutrition for Kids



Sport is a good form of exercise as it enables us to build strength, stamina and endurance besides sharpening our mental alertness. Good nutrition is crucial for appropriate growth, development, and excellence in performance. Teaching children proper nutrition, is a key to healthy life. This is especially true for kids who participate in sports. Playing sport while growing results in a significant increase in nutrient requirements. Growth or intensive physical activity can be effected adversely if the diet does not cover these increased requirements.

DIET

Generally, nutritionists still recommend a balanced diet. However, you may need to modify your dietary needs slightly as extra energy is needed to fuel your increased activity level. Kids need to eat the right amount and mix of foods to support that higher level of activity, but that mix might not be too different from a normal healthy diet. Eating for sports should be an extension of healthy eating for life.

Carbohydrate: Most athletes eat their usual food but in larger quantities to generate the extra energy needed. For this purpose, carbohydrates are best as they are easily digested and absorbed, providing immediate energy. Normally, carbohydrates make up 50-60% of our diet. When you're choosing carbohydrates (carbs), look for whole-grain foods like whole-wheat flour or pasta, brown rice, whole-grain bread and cereal, and plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Protein and fats: Balanced proportion of protein & fats is required. Protein is needed to build and repair muscles, but most kids get plenty of protein through a balanced diet. Strong muscles come from regular training and exercise and too much protein can lead to dehydration and calcium loss. Protein-rich foods include fish, lean red meat and poultry, dairy products, nuts, soy products.

Vitamins and Minerals: A diet packed with a variety of fruits and vegetables will see to the athlete's needs for vitamins and minerals. Kids need a variety of vitamins and minerals. Calcium and iron are two important minerals for athletes. Calcium helps build strong bones to resist breaking and stress fractures. Calcium-rich foods include dairy products like milk, yogurt, etc . Iron-rich foods include red meat, chicken, tuna, salmon, eggs, dried fruits, leafy green vegetables, and whole grains etc.

Parents of young sportspeople should pay special attention to 4 guiding principles:

1. Have a proper breakfast. It should at least consist of a drink, some fruit or fruit juice, a dairy product, cereals and bread.
2. Eat a mid-morning and an afternoon snack. The morning snack is often useful to those who get up early, and the afternoon snack is valuable for all children. Snacks can, for example, be dairy products (e.g. flavoured milk), a breakfast cereal, or a cereal bar containing dried fruit.
3. Balance lunch and dinner. These major meals must provide protein which is essential for the child's growth. Protein requirements for children are 2.5 g of proteins per kg of body weight.
4. Drink a lot. Preferably pure water or milk.

Hydration and Performance

Another critical consideration for athletes is fluid intake.

You may lose 2-3kg of sweat an hour through a hard workout. So, adequate fluid is needed to replace the water lost and to prevent dehydration. Dehydration brings on dizziness and cramps besides reducing muscle strength and endurance. Drink lots of water before, during and after exercising. Do not wait till you are thirsty.

Eat Smart Before You Start

The "pre-game meal" should meet the following guidelines:

- Provide sufficient fluid to maintain hydration.
- High in carbohydrates for energy and blood glucose maintenance. Meal should contain mainly complex (slow release) carbohydrates (rice, pasta, semolina, potatoes, etc.)
- Moderate in protein. just keep the overall amounts relatively small, as protein can be slow to digest
- Low in fat/fiber to promote digestive processing and decrease digestive stress.
- Low in salt.
- Composed of foods/drinks familiar to the athlete and well-tolerated.
- Ideally, it should be taken 3 hours before any intensive physical activity – since digestion of food and physical performance are largely incompatible.
- Healthy examples include low-fibre cereal with milk and fruit; a granola bar with milkshake; a glass of milk and an apple

Refueling is giving back to your body what it has used during activity. To refuel properly, a meal or snack should be consumed within thirty minutes of ending athletic activity. The best refueling meals and snacks contain both carbohydrates and protein. If it is time for a meal after a sports practice or competition, refueling is usually simple. However, if it is not a normal meal time, it is important to add at least a "light" snack. Each time you refuel properly, you are preparing your body better for future activities.

You can make the most of your athletic talents and have more strength, power and endurance when you get the right sports nutrition. So eat healthy... stay healthy !! play healthy !!!

By,
Ms. Shweta Vajratkar,

Sports Science Nutritionist