



# Sports Shorts

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

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## Nutrition for Sports Performance

### Why is sports nutrition important?

Young athletes train long hours for their sport. In order to optimize that training, proper nutrition needs to be a regular component of their workout plan. Healthy eating has to be a priority; meal and snack planning takes extra time and is often pushed to the side due to hectic family schedules. A healthy eating plan can help prevent injuries, decrease muscle soreness, improve energy levels, and improve focus.

### What makes up a healthy meal or snack?

Carbohydrates and protein should be the center of your meals and snacks. High-fat meals that are fried or covered in creamy sauces should be avoided immediately before exercise.

### Meals

- Whole wheat pita with turkey, cheese, and vegetables; banana, a glass of low fat milk
- Rice bowl with brown rice, beans, cheese, salsa, vegetables, avocado
- Stir fry with chicken or lean steak, veggies, and brown rice

### Snacks

- Smoothie with yogurt and frozen berries
- Graham crackers with peanut butter and 1 glass of chocolate milk
- Eggs (1-2) on whole grain toast
- Bagel, english muffin, crackers, or toast with peanut butter
- Half peanut butter/jelly or banana sandwich
- Cottage cheese with fruit
- String cheese or any cheese portion with pretzels or crackers

### How can I eat healthy between practices, games, tournaments?

It is very important for athletes to eat on a regular schedule especially on days with multiple games and tournaments. You want to avoid the "something is better than nothing" mentality. Here are some quick tips:

- Pack a cooler! Fill it with fruit kabobs, veggies with dip, yogurt cups, string cheese, small milk jugs, and sandwiches.
- If you go through the drive thru, make healthy selections including grilled chicken sandwiches, salads or wraps, bean burritos, veggie pizza, baked potatoes, fruit, and yogurt.
- Avoid engineered sports fuels including bars, sports drinks, and gels. These are not necessary in an active athlete's diet. Eat real food!
- Create a parents group that rotates providing the team healthy snacks.
- Always keep snacks in your sports bag or purse just in case.

### What are some methods for proper hydration techniques?

- Stick to water, milk, and 100% fruit juice as proper hydration methods
  - Limit juice to 4-6 oz per day
  - Have 2-3 glasses of milk per day
- Aim for at least 64-80 ounces of water per day
- Sports drinks should be used in the following situations:
  - Exercising > 60 minutes especially for help fueling back to back games
  - Hot, humid summer days
  - If you are a very salty, heavy sweater
- Do not use sports drink as a casual beverage throughout the day or with meals.
- Try infusing your water! Add fruit and herbs such as strawberry, oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit, mint, or basil.
- Avoid packets and drops to flavor water. Avoid soda, sugary beverages, energy drinks, coffee, and tea.
- Monitor the urine. The color of urine should be clear to light yellow (like lemonade).

### What and when should you eat before practice or competition?

- Your body needs a well-balanced meal or large snack 3-4 hours prior to competition. For morning competitions and practice, try 2 hours beforehand.
- Have a small snack 30-60 minutes before competition.

### What should you eat after practice or competition?

- You should have a snack or meal within 15-60 minutes of exercise
- If you are not able to eat solid food after exercising, try something liquid based like white milk, chocolate milk, or a fruit smoothie made with yogurt.

### Should I take sports supplements or energy drinks to optimize my performance?

No. Supplements are appealing because they often offer a "quick" fix and have attractive media and marketing strategies. However, supplements do not have to be proven safe or effective before they hit store shelves and do not have to accurately list the ingredients found in their products. Supplements are removed from stores only when they are shown to be harmful. Instead focus on a well-balanced diet, proper meal timing, and good hydration techniques for sports performance enhancement.

*This information is available on the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics' website at [www.ohioaap.org](http://www.ohioaap.org)*