



# Sports Shorts

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

## Weight Loss Practices and Nutrition in Wrestlers

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Wrestlers often cut weight to gain a competitive edge over their opponent in a given weight class. Unfortunately, many athletes practice unhealthy methods in order to lose this weight which can lead to decreased performance in school and sports as well as medical problems. When weight loss is monitored and done in a healthy manner, however, the young athlete can become stronger and maintain his/her health through the wrestling season.

True healthful weight loss should be done in the off-season and not saved until the start of the wrestling season because it is hard to make healthful dietary changes while also having the added burden to make weight each week. Weight loss involves a calorie deficit which can be challenging during the competitive season because athletes need adequate energy to optimize performance both on the mat and in the classroom. If your wrestler is interested in weight loss, encourage him/her to consult a registered dietitian to help with a supervised weight loss plan.

### What could happen if I cut weight too quickly?

Cutting weight too quickly, whether by restricting calories, fluid, or both, can be very dangerous. Calorie restriction can result in a loss of essential macronutrients, vitamins, and minerals. Dehydration, along with low energy intake, can lead to loss of muscle strength, stamina, and overall endurance. Many wrestlers will also have great difficulty concentrating and experience low energy levels. You should never lose more than 2% of your body weight in fluid during a workout. To make sure this does not occur, weigh yourself before and after practice and for each pound lost, drink 16-24 ounces of water. Signs of dehydration include:

- Headache
- Dry mouth
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Tiredness
- Thirst
- Rapid heartbeat
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Little or no urination
- Dry skin and lips
- Muscle cramps
- Decreased concentration

In extreme cases, heat stroke, fever, no urine production, and swelling of the brain may occur.

### Healthy weight loss tips:

- Drink plenty of water. If you're dehydrated you won't be able to wrestle or perform at your best.
- Eat a wide variety of nutrient dense foods including whole, fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains. These foods will give you long lasting energy to help you maintain your energy levels and recover from training.
- Lose weight slowly at a rate of 1-2 pounds per week to make sure you are losing fat mass instead of muscle mass.
- Space your meals and snacks evenly throughout the day to help maintain your energy levels.

- Avoid "cheat days" when trying to manage weight throughout the season. Desserts and other "junk" food is okay in moderation, but avoid entire days dedicated to eating poorly.
- Get plenty of sleep! Aim for at least 8 hours each night. You can't expect to perform well at practice if you're running on no sleep!
- Focus on lean choices of meat and healthy fats.

Options include:

Lean meats:

- Chicken
- Turkey
- Pork
- Beef jerky
- Canadian bacon
- Ham
- Fish
- Lean cuts of beef

Healthy fat choices:

- Avocado
- Nuts
- Nut butters
- Oils

- Take a multivitamin to improve immune health.
- Fuel immediately after practice and training to ensure proper muscle recovery.
- Wrestlers frequently forget to pack a lunch or skip lunch all together. Some quick ideas to pack for lunch each day may be found at [OhioAAP.org/news/sports-shorts](http://OhioAAP.org/news/sports-shorts).

### Unhealthy weight loss strategies to avoid

- Relying on loss of water to lose weight. If you are going to lose weight through sweating, only limit this to the day of weigh in's. If you keep your weight within 2-3 pounds fully hydrated, sweating this off before weigh in's will not be as detrimental compared to restricting fluid all week
- Self-induced vomiting could not only result in water and electrolyte loss, but could lead to extensive damage to your esophagus.
- Avoid use of laxatives or other weight loss products. These products are not to be used unless directed by a physician and could cause many long term health consequences if used incorrectly.
- Do not use saunas or trash bags to increase sweat rate. This method will cause you to overheat quickly and potentially dehydrate you.
- Avoid low carbohydrate diets. As an athlete, you need carbohydrates for energy to help fuel your workouts. Limiting them to control your weight will cause low energy and mental fatigue.
- Limit extreme calorie restriction or fasting. Even if you are trying to lose weight, your body still needs energy throughout the day. You need the proper fuel to optimize you workouts at practice. This is the key to becoming a better wrestler and ultimately staying healthy throughout the season!
- Do not use caffeine for energy or appetite. Caffeine is a stimulant which only increases your mental alertness short term. As a student athlete, you need energy that is provided long term for overall health and sports performance alike!

For added information regarding nutrition considerations for wrestling, visit [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org) to download "Nutrition For The Wrestling Athlete"

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