

Nutrition Guidelines for Practice and Pregame:

Nutrition is often overlooked as a potential competitive edge possibly because it is poorly understood. It has been shown that proper eating before exercise improves performance. It is also important to be well hydrated before the exercise session. Too many high school athletes head off to school without eating breakfast, lunch may be a slice of pizza. At this point they, with very little fuel in their system, they are not prepared to be their best at game time or even practice.

Some signs that an athlete may not be eating enough to fuel their performance are:

- Difficulty paying attention in practice or in a game.
- Weight loss
- Fatigue before the practice or games have been completed.
- Injury or frequent illness.^[1]_{SEP}

Nutrition Tips

To help athletes achieve peak performance it is important to promote healthy eating and adequate fluid intake. Encourage athletes to take time to eat breakfast everyday. Remind your athletes that lunch for many of them will be their pre-game meal and to eat accordingly. And for some athletes, lunch may be as early as 10:30 in the morning and they may not be eating again until after practice or after the game. The size of the meal or snack eaten before exercise is important because adequate time is needed for digestion. A meal or snack that is high in protein and/or fat will take longer to digest. Years ago a typical pre-game meal was steak and eggs which is mostly protein and fat. Many studies have confirmed an ideal pre-game meal should be predominantly carbohydrate. Eating foods high in carbohydrate can maintain blood glucose levels during exercise and provide fuel for the exercise session. The closer it gets to game time or practice, the smaller the meal or snack should be.

The body must have the proper fuel for peak performance; there are no substitutes for good nutrition. Some athletes may be tempted to try an energy drink as a quick pick me up before they compete. There are no quick fixes, including energy drinks, for not eating and drinking adequately during the day. Keep in mind some of these energy drinks may be too high in caffeine to be considered a healthy choice (have your athletes read the label). They should not take the place of healthy meals and adequate fluids during the day.

Pre-Game Nutrition Guidelines:

4 or more hours before game:

- Sandwich with lean meat such as turkey or ham, fresh fruit or juice, lowfat milk or lowfat yogurt.

3 hours before game:

- Fruit or juice, bagel or toast with a little peanut butter, light cream cheese or margarine or cereal with lowfat milk and fruit.

1-2 hours before game:

- Fresh fruit or fruit juice or a sports beverage.

Foods higher in fat and protein such as steak and eggs, pizza, nachos, and hot dogs will leave the stomach very slowly and be unavailable for fuel during exercise and should be avoided immediately before exercise.

To help keep athletes well hydrated, encourage them to:

- Stop at the drinking fountain between classes.
- Bring a water bottle to school and to practice so that they may take frequent water breaks.
- Drink fluids with their breakfast and lunch.

During practice and in game situations to drink during time outs or breaks in play, and to drink even in they claim they are not thirsty (since thirst is not a good indicator of hydration).