



Basic Nutrition for Athletes

Eat a Good Breakfast

It's true, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Start the day with a hearty breakfast to get your metabolism fired up for the day. Breakfast should contain carbs (such as whole-wheat bread, cereal or fruit) and a source of protein (such as eggs, yogurt or milk). Oatmeal made with milk; last night's dinner leftovers; an egg sandwich; a yogurt-granola parfait; or a smoothie made with fruit, yogurt and milk are all great breakfast choices. If you are always running late in the morning, assemble something the night before you can grab on the way out the door.

Snack Often

Adding snacks throughout the day can help maintain your energy level and allow for intake of adequate nutrients, vitamins and minerals. By snacking frequently, you alleviate having to have large meals that may leave you feeling sluggish. Carry snacks with you that do not require refrigeration such as peanut butter and apple, granola bars, trail mix or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Don't Skip Lunch

Many student athletes compete after school, which makes lunch an essential fuel source for competition. Lunch should be hearty and represent as many food groups as possible, including whole grains, lean protein, fruit, vegetables and low-fat dairy. You might think opting for a light lunch such as a salad (or even skipping lunch altogether) will leave you light on your feet, but instead, it may leave your tank empty at game time.

Focus on Carbs for Energy

Choose whole-grain bread, crackers, cereal, pasta and fruit for lasting energy. Save the sports drinks for an energy boost during endurance sports or training sessions lasting more than an hour. Avoid foods high in refined carbohydrate such as soda, candy, white bread, junk food, sugary cereal, potato chips and french fries. These items lead to excess fat storage, low energy level and chronic diseases.

Spread out Protein Foods

Muscles love protein. It helps them stay strong, recover from intense exercise and build more muscle over time. Athletes should spread protein foods throughout the day, have some at each snack and meal, such as deli meat on a sandwich at lunch, nuts with snacks or an egg with breakfast. There is no need to eat an excess of protein or use protein supplements. Your body can only absorb up to 25 gm at a time.

Use Caution with Fatty Foods

Fatty foods slow digestion, which is not ideal for the athlete facing a competition. Greasy, fried foods and fatty desserts are filling and may leave you tired and sluggish during training or competition. Skip the french fries or pizza before workouts, and keep the fat content on the light side.



Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

Going into a workout or competition already dehydrated is a setting you up for failure. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water prior to your sporting event, especially in the two to three hours before game time. Continue to drink during the event (about a 1/2 cup every 15 minutes) and afterward to rehydrate after sweat loss. Sports drinks are only recommended if you participate in an endurance sport with continuous exertion lasting longer than 1 hour (such as football practice, cross country or soccer). Add ½ tsp of salt to 16oz of sport drink for endurance events in hot weather will help with rehydration.

Timing Is Everything

When you eat is just as important as what you eat. Your body needs two to three hours to digest a regular meal such as breakfast or lunch before competition, while a small snack such as a fruit can be eaten 30 minutes to an hour before competition. A good rule to remember: load up at meals but don't overeat, and keep snacks light as you get closer game time.

Recovery Fuel

The exact timing and composition for refueling is up for debate. In general, eating a snack consisting of protein and carbohydrates soon after the end of your event will help with the recovery. Most athletes do not feel like eating right after an event, but keep in mind, eating something within 1 hour of the end of your event will help with recovery. Your snack should consist of carbohydrates to help refill your “fuel” and protein will help to rebuild your muscles you used. Choose a snack with a ratio between 2:1 and 4:1 of carbohydrate to protein. Chocolate milk is the perfect recovery drink, but other quick and easy snacks include a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; fruit and yogurt; or nuts with 2 cheese sticks and pretzels.

Even More Nutrition Education

The Food & Nutrition webpage on the DVUSD website contains more information and quick tip sheets. It is being updated regularly with tips and tricks to make eating and being a student athlete easier. Coming soon...Sample menus. Click on the chef and follow tabs to “Student Athlete Nutrition”

<http://www.dvUSD.org/Page/49306>

Nutrition Information on the Web

Be careful what “resources” you find when surfing the web. There is good information, but much of the information is misleading and can be dangerous, especially for young athletes. Good points to ask yourself are:

- Is the information from a reputable source? These usually end in .edu, .gov or .org.
- Is the site trying to sell you something or buy into a program?
- Does the information seem too good to be true?
- Does the information follow the same basic principles outlined above?

If the answer is “no” to any of the questions please ask before you proceed. Check out the information with your coach or the district Registered Dietitian Nutritionist listed below.