

Nutrition for the soccer player

Answer these 3 questions:

1. Do you notice your child feels tired during or after a game?
2. Does it seem like they're getting more injuries than usual?
3. Do you worry your child may not be eating properly for optimal sports performance ?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions then explore this section of our website to find out how you can help your child achieve optimal sports performance on the soccer field....

You probably already know healthy and nutritious food is good for your child but did you know it can also help them out on the soccer field?

Eating well will give them the energy they need to play better and for longer; keep them mentally sharp and on top of their game; and replace the energy and fluids they've lost during training or a competition therefore helping with recovery.

To help your child perform at their peak on the soccer field, follow these nutrition tips on:

- [Fuelling up](#)
- [Fluids](#)
- [Eating and drinking before sports](#)
- [Eating and drinking during sports](#)
- [Eating and drinking after sports](#)
- [Sports carnivals](#)

Fuelling up

Did you know?

During a soccer game the most important source of energy to fuel working muscles is carbohydrate.

What is a carbohydrate?

Carbohydrate is the part of food that our body prefers to use as a source of energy. It is found in foods as either starches or sugars. Both starches and sugars are broken down in the intestine during digestion and absorbed into the bloodstream. The form of sugar found in the blood is called glucose.

Glucose is the most important fuel for working muscles.

The following table shows the carbohydrate content of a variety of foods. Choose mostly foods that provide carbohydrate in the form of starches or natural sugars as these foods also provide important nutrients to the body. Foods and drinks that contain mostly added sugars can be useful during a game, or after a game for re-fuelling.

Foods	Amount of carbohydrate (grams)
<i>These foods provide carbohydrate in the form of starches.</i>	
Breads and cereals	
2 slices of regular bread	30
1 English muffin	23
1 bread roll	24
1 cup flaky cereal	25-29
3 wheat cereal biscuits	27
1/2 cup untoasted muesli	27
1/3 cup dry rolled oats	23
1 small muesli bar	24-29
Pasta, noodles, rice	
3/4 cup cooked pasta or noodles	29
2/3 cup cooked rice	28
Potatoes and corn	
1 cup sweet potato	31
1 large corn-on-the-cob	25
1 large potato	27
Legumes	
3/4 cup legumes	19
1 cup baked beans	30
<i>These foods provide carbohydrate in the form of natural sugars (and added sugars for some flavoured dairy foods).</i>	
Fruit	
1 medium piece of fruit	17-20
2 cups mixed berries	15
12 dried apricot halves	16
1 large wedge of watermelon	16

200ml fruit juice	17
2 tablespoons sultanas	20
Milk, yoghurt and ice-cream	
250ml reduced fat milk	13
200g tub low fat natural yoghurt	16
200g tub low fat fruit yoghurt	30
3 scoops low fat ice cream	18
<i>These foods provide carbohydrate in the form of added sugars.</i>	
Sugar	
3 flat tsp sugar or honey	18
Spreads	
20g Nutella	11
20g jam	13
Lollies, cakes, biscuits, soft drinks	
30g jelly beans	28
60g chocolate bar	40
250ml cordial diluted	20
375ml can soft drink	37
Sports drinks	
200-250ml sports drink	16

How is glucose stored in the body?

Glucose is stored in the liver and muscles, and in its storage form it is called glycogen. If you're child's glycogen stores run low, they can lack energy for competition and training. It is therefore important that the muscles and liver are provided with plenty of glucose before training and competitions from a regular intake of carbohydrate rich foods, to help keep glycogen stores topped up.

Having large stores of glycogen means your child will have the energy they need to train and perform better without tiring as quickly. If glycogen stores are not topped up, their next training session or competition may seem harder and they will tire much earlier.

What can I do to top up my fuel stores?

Eating a meal or snack rich in carbohydrate before, during and after sport will help to top up the glucose stored in the muscles.

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.
3. Xyris Software. *Food Works Professional*. Brisbane: Xyris Software, 2005.

FLUIDS

Did you know?

Being thirsty is a sign that you're already dehydrated. Start drinking before you feel thirsty.

How can I tell if I'm dehydrated?

Don't wait until your child tells you they're thirsty to offer them a drink. By this stage they will already be dehydrated. Dehydration will affect your child's performance on the field and slow down their recovery process.

Signs of dehydration include:

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness

Which drink is best?

For most children playing soccer, water is the best way of keeping hydrated. However, other good choices include low fat milk and diluted fruit juice. Sports drinks can be useful for games that are over an hour long or for sports carnivals where a quick top up of carbohydrate and fluids in-between games is needed.

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.
3. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Fact Sheet: Fluids in Sport*. 2007.

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Eating and Drinking Before Sports

Eating before sports is your child's last chance to make sure they've got enough energy and fluids to get them through training or a game.

Sports nutrition guidelines generally recommend a low fibre, carbohydrate rich pre-event meal or snack.

Remember:

Choose carbohydrate-rich foods that are low in fat and fibre but provide other nutrients such as protein, calcium and iron, which will also help your child perform at their best out on the field.

Tips for eating and drinking before sport:

1. Choose foods your child is comfortable and familiar with, especially before a big game. This is not the time to try new foods!!! You want them to be able to do their best without feeling hungry, bloated or having an upset stomach.
2. 2-4 hours before training or a game give your child a low fibre, carbohydrate rich meal such as:

Meal
Nutella (20g) on toast (2 slices) + reduced fat milk (1 glass) + 1 banana
Low fibre breakfast cereal (30g) + reduced fat milk (200ml) + 1 banana
Canned spaghetti (1 cup) on toast (2 slices)
Steamed rice (1 cup) + stir-fried vegetables

3. 1 hour before training or a game offer your child a snack high in carbohydrate such as :

Snack
Fruit Smoothie (200ml low fat milk + 1 banana)
Sports drink
Muesli bar

4. If your child has a game early in the morning, getting them to eat breakfast can be challenging. They might find it easier to drink rather than eat so try a fruit smoothie or a ready to drink breakfast on the run product.
5. If training or a game lasts for more than an hour, encourage your child to drink 150-250ml every fifteen minutes in the hour beforehand.
6. Advise your child to sip on fluids before a game.
7. Remember your child will need to drink more during warmer weather.

Want more information on eating and drinking before sports?

- [\[Link to Fuelling up\]](#)
- [\[Link to Fluids\]](#)

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.
3. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Fact Sheet: Fluids in Sport*. 2007.
4. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Eating and Drinking Before Sport*. Victoria, 2009.

Eating and Drinking During Sports

When we exercise we lose fluid through our sweat. Sweating is important as it helps us to cool down.

During sports children can get caught up in the excitement of their game and forget to drink. If they don't drink enough this can lead to dehydration which will affect their performance on the field.

If your child's training session or game goes for more than an hour their energy stores will need to be topped up. Energy comes from carbohydrate either stored in the muscles and liver as glycogen or found in the blood as glucose.

Tips for eating and drinking during sport

1. Encourage your child to start drinking early on in the game.
2. Be at the sidelines ready with their drink bottle so when your child is subbed off they can drink.
3. Advise your child to drink around 150ml-250ml every 15-20 minutes.
4. Teach you child this great tip from the Sports Dietitians Australia 'drink small amounts of fluid regularly until you're not thirsty anymore, and then have another few gulps'.
5. Remember your child will need to drink more during warmer weather.
6. If your child's training session or game goes for more than an hour they will need to refuel during the game. Start refueling early on in the game with:
 - Sports drinks which provide much needed fluids and carbohydrate for energy.
 - A high carbohydrate snack during half time or a break such as:

Snack
A slice of bread with 2 tsp Nutella
1 Muesli bar
1 breakfast bar
1 banana
Jelly babies or jelly beans
Sultanas
Orange slices

Want more information?

- [\[Link to Fuelling up\]](#)
- [\[Link to Fluids\]](#)

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.
3. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Fact Sheet: Fluids in Sport*. 2007.

4. Sports Dietitians Australia. Eating and Drinking During and After Sport. Victoria, 2008.

Eating and Drinking After Sports

What your child eats and drinks 2-3 hours after sport is important for their recovery process.

Tips for eating and drinking after sport

Remember to help your child recover they need to follow the 3 R's:

1. Rehydrate – drink fluids
2. Refuel – eat foods high in carbohydrates to top up fuel stores
3. Repair – eat foods high in protein to help repair any damage in the muscles that may have occurred during training or a competition [[link to more on protein](#)].

Offer your child these high carbohydrate and protein meals or snacks after sport:

Meal or Snack
Nutella (20g) on toast (2 slices) + reduced fat milk (1 glass) + 1 banana
Breakfast cereal (1 cup) + 1 banana + reduced-fat milk (200ml)
Tuna and salad sandwich (90g tuna + 1 cup salad + 2 slices bread)
Low-fat yoghurt (1 tub) + fruit salad
Baked potato (1) + baked beans (1 cup) + grated cheese (40g)
Steamed Rice (1-2 cups) + beef (100g) and vegetable stir-fry
Spaghetti Bolognese (1cup pasta + 100g Bolognese)

Want more information?

- [[Link to Fuelling up](#)]
- [[Link to Fluids](#)]
- [[Link to More on Protein](#)]

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.
3. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Fact Sheet: Fluids in Sport*. 2007.
4. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Eating and Drinking During and After Sport*. Victoria, 2008.

More on protein

Your child needs protein to help them build and repair muscle tissue. This is particularly important after training or a big game.

However eating large amounts of protein-rich foods does not necessarily mean bigger muscles. This is because any additional protein that your child has above their requirements will be broken down and used as fuel.

Choose protein rich foods such as lean meat, fish, eggs, milk, yoghurt, cheese, nuts and legumes which provide other nutrients such as calcium or iron. These nutrients also have an important role in how well your child does in training or competition.

Sources of Protein

FOOD	PROTEIN (g)
120g red meat (raw)	24
100g chicken (raw)	20
100g tinned fish	25
4 tablespoons of skim milk powder	12
200g of low fat natural or diet yoghurt	11
30g reduced fat hard cheese	8
5 oysters	9
1 cup reduced fat milk	8
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup legumes	9
5 prawns (raw)	19
2 medium eggs	10
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cooked pasta	6
2 slices of wholegrain bread	5
$\frac{2}{3}$ cup of cooked rice	2
120g tofu	10
1 cup of flaky breakfast cereal	6
3 scoops ice-cream	3
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of chopped vegetables	2-3
Muesli Bar	2-3

References

1. Burke, L. and V. Deakin, *Clinical Sports Nutrition 3rd Edition*. 2007: McGraw Hill Australia.
2. Sports Dietitians Australia. *Fact Sheet 5: Protein for Athletes*. 1999 [cited 2006].
3. Xyris Software. *Food Works Professional*. Brisbane: Xyris Software, 2005.

Sports carnivals

Tips for sports carnivals:

Follow these tips to help your child compete at their best during sport carnivals:

- Pack your child a cooler bag full of drinks and carbohydrate-rich foods.
- Pack both a bottle of plain water and a flavoured drink such as cordial or a sports drink.
- Encourage your child to drink around 150ml every 15-20 minutes.
- If there is less than an hour before or between your child's next game then advise them to have a flavoured drink such as cordial or a sports drink. This will top up their energy and fluid needs quickly.
- If they have 1 – 2 hours between events offer fluids and a carbohydrate rich snack. For snack ideas see Tips for eating and drinking before sport. [link to Tips for eating and drinking before sport]
- If your child's next event is over 3 hours away then give them a carbohydrate rich meal. For meal ideas see Tips for eating and drinking before sport. [link to Tips for eating and drinking before sport]
- Always remember to encourage your child to keep up their fluids especially during longer breaks and in warmer weather.

References

1. Sports Dietitians Australia, *Fuelling and Cooling the Junior Athlete*. 2001.