

June 2015 | momsteam.com | Suzanne Nelson, SC.D., RD | Nutrition

Top Ten Nutrition Tips for Kids Playing Sports

"I don't need to worry about what I eat...I burn off so many calories it doesn't matter." "If I start to feel hungry, I just grab whatever I can get my hands on."

As a sports nutritionist, these are typical athlete statements that I hear all the time. If only they were true...

While we all need nutritious food everyday to fuel our busy lives and to keep us healthy, if you're in training for a race or event, it's even more important to make sure your food choices count nutritionally.

One of the most common mistakes athletes make is to believe that they can eat just about anything they want. Nothing could be further from the truth. Active people can eat more calories than those who are more sedentary but that doesn't mean they can eat and drink "junk" (foods and beverage with little to no nutritional value) without paying the price. In fact, many pros say that their major breakthroughs happened when they started paying close attention to what and when they ate and drank.

Physical fitness increases energy requirements and protein needs and the requirements for some vitamins and minerals. For most active people, all those additional energy and nutrient needs can be met by eating a nutrient-rich diet. While it's fairly easy to eat a balanced meal, many of us reach for a glass of chocolate milk whatever is convenient for a snack. Since snacks account for a significant proportion of our total diet, it's important to make the most of those between-meal noshes.



Here's a guide to 10 great sports snacks from Christine Roberts, Ph.D., R.D., C.S.S.D., a leading sports dietitian who has worked with age-group, collegiate and professional athletes for more than twenty years.

Almonds

1 ounce (23 almonds) provides 170 calories, 6 g protein, 3 g fiber, 75 mg calcium and 7.4 mg Vitamin E (highest of all nuts), antioxidants and heart healthy fats.

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[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

Top Ten Nutrition Tips for Kids Playing Sports

1. Make sure your child drinks enough fluids

Children have special fluid needs. Compared to adults, kids are more likely to suffer a heat illness when exercising in the heat.

Give your kids a sports drink to prevent fatigue and dehydration. Studies show that lightly sweetened, flavored, non-carbonated beverages such as sports drinks do a better job than water of preventing dehydration. [But remember: sports drinks should not be consumed at meals, and should generally only be used when an athlete is playing sports for more than hour (soccer, lacrosse, hockey, football, cross-country, etc.). Young athlete drinking from a water bottle



Have your kids drink according to a schedule. Give kids a squeeze bottle and have them drink 5 to 9 ounces ever 20 minutes to keep hydrated.

Weigh kids before and after exercise to determine how much fluids they are losing during activity. After exercise have your child drink at least 24 ounces of a sports drink for every pound lost during exercise.

2. Practice supplement safety

The FDA does not regulate dietary supplements. There is thus no guarantee of purity, safety or effectiveness. What's in the bottle may do more harm than good.

Don't risk your child's health!

3. Optimize muscle recovery

Help young muscles recover fast - have children eat and/or drink a high protein snack within 30 minutes after exercise

Eat a high carbohydrate, moderate protein meal 1-2 hours later to continue with muscle recovery.

4. Remember pre-exercise meals

A pre-exercise meal is important to prevent hunger and to supply energy to athletes' working muscles.

The night before competition and 2 hours before exercise: focus on carbs, moderate protein, low-fat foods and fluids (pasta with veggies and chicken, fruit, milk, cereal, yogurt, toast, juice).

5. Target carbohydrates for energy

Carbohydrates are the main energy source for exercise and the major fuel for the brain.

Carbohydrates stores (glycogen) in the body are limited kids must replenish carbohydrate stores every day.

Top food sources: pasta, rice, breads, milk, yogurt, cereals, fruits and vegetables. For a list of high carbohydrate

foods, [click here](#). Fruit medley

6. Protein's the building block

Protein plays a role in building muscle, fighting infection, and provides signals and controls for tissue growth and maintenance.

While protein is important, a high-protein diet is not recommended for athletes and replacing carbohydrates with protein can actually impair athletic performance. Without adequate carbs an athlete will tire quickly and won't have the energy to train or compete.

Top food sources: poultry, meat, fish, cheese, yogurt, milk and beans or legumes.

7. Don't forget some fat

A high-fat diet is not healthy - but neither is a zero-fat diet.

Having some fat in the diet is important for health and is a key energy source for young athletes.

Go for low-fat foods as well as non-fat foods.

8. Keep kids' fuel tanks filled

In addition to healthy meals, provide healthy snacks before and after exercise.

Pack high-carbohydrate, moderate protein, low-fat snacks such as granola bars, energy bars, pretzels, trail mix, fruit, peanut butter and crackers, bagels, and fluids. For a list of snacks, [click here](#)

9. Variety is the spice of life

A healthy lifestyle is all about making choices.

Are your kids eating the same foods day after day? They're probably missing out on important nutrients be different try new foods and recipes.

Foods high in carbohydrates and fiber (grains, veggies, fruits) are essential to good health.

10. Get your kids energized!

Meet active kids' energy needs through foods and fluids.

The best balance for active kids: 50-55% of calories from carbohydrates, such as bread, cereal, rice and pasta; 10-15% from protein food like meat, poultry, fish, dry beans and nuts; and 25-30% from fats such as oils and sweets.

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