



# Soccer Nutrition

The Warren County Health and Fitness committee would like to help in providing parents, players, and coaches' information on nutrition to achieve peak performance, reduce ailments, and develop healthy life long habits.

There is a wide range of differing nutritional needs of athletes depending upon the sport they are playing. Soccer athletes require a complex carbohydrate, low fat, low protein diet and lots of fluids.

Have you ever witnessed your son, daughter or another player running out of steam during the second half of the game? This is often not the result of a lack of fitness but a lack of energy. In fact, it is most likely caused by the lack of carbohydrates in the days leading up to the match.

Why should soccer players eat foods that are high in carbohydrates? Carbohydrates are the most efficient fuel for energy production. They are stored as glycogen in the muscles and liver and are readily available as an energy source when called upon. They are most beneficial when engaged in strenuous exercise. Foods that contain high carbohydrate contents are grains, cereals, bread, crackers, rolls, pasta (all kinds), rice, muffins, bagels, fruit, low fat yogurt and starchy vegetables.

Let's identify some of those "peak performance" eating routines. What should the players eat and drink before, during, and after the game?

## PRE-GAME

Several days before and especially the night before a game the meals should consist of complex carbohydrate, low fat, and low protein meals. No more than 10% of all calories should come from protein. Cut down on meats, eggs, and nuts. Soccer players also want to eat 2 to 3 hours before a game and avoid foods that have a high fat content or are high in calories

because they slow down the digestive process. Foods such as butter, margarine, mayonnaise, salad dressings, cream cheese, gravies, sauces, and fried foods. Also soccer players need to cut down on high protein and high fat foods such as fish, meats, poultry, cheese, milk (unless it's skim), nuts and seeds.

Eating a pre-game meal that is light and low fat will speed the emptying of the stomach. Having to digest food in your stomach at game time will divert energy from muscles leading to early fatigue. A breakfast containing fruit, waffles or pancakes, cereal, and bagels should be consumed over sausage, bacon, or eggs.

Proper hydration before a game is just as important. Water is the best liquid to drink to replenish lost fluids. The trick is to keep the body well hydrated and drink before you get thirsty. If you feel thirsty then you are already dehydrated. The pre-game rule of thumb is 16 to 20 ounces of water 2 hrs before the game. Ten to fifteen minutes before the game drink 12 to 14 oz of a sports drink. Avoid carbonated drinks as they contain caffeine and cause dehydration and the carbonated bubbles make it hard to digest before playing.

## DURING the GAME

Obviously the soccer players will not be eating during the game but hydration is crucial. Sports drinks such as Gatorade and PowerAde are glucose based and instantly give carbohydrates as well as replenish electrolytes lost during the game. Research states that they help to avoid fatigue and cramps better than water. Suggestions are 12 to 14 oz during halftime and sips in between. The warmer the weather the more you should drink.

## AFTER the GAME

Keep drinking!! This helps to get rid of toxins that have built up during the game or practice for that matter. A beverage high in sugar is necessary immediately after each game. Sports drinks are not necessarily high in sugar. Be sure to read the labels. Avoid eating right away. Follow up with a healthy meal at least 1 and a half to 2 hours after the game to give the body time to

repair itself rather than digest a meal. Avoid carbonated drinks as these may fill up the stomach and prevent the player from drinking adequate fluids.

Tournament games often play havoc with the players eating and drinking schedules. Try to follow the pre-game and post game suggestions outline above to achieve their peak performances during game time. For the in between games that occur in the same day be sure to come prepared with high carbohydrate, low fat and low protein foods. Stay away from burgers, hot dogs, chips, fries and nachos as these may take hours to digest.

Here are some suggestions on what to eat during soccer tournaments. These are easy to carry and won't spoil!

Soccer tournament snack foods:      \* =high carbohydrate content

Apples\*

Bananas\*

Dried banana chips

Apricots\*

Raisins\*

Fig Newton cookies

Graham crackers

Granola bars\*

Bagels\*

Hard pretzels

Fruit snacks

Blueberry muffins\*

English muffins

Corn flakes

Cold cereal\* i.e. chex mix

Juice boxes

Candy-clear kind like gummies; avoid chocolate (high fat & calories)

Raw vegetables:

Broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, green peppers, peas, corn, beans, yams, potatoes (plain)

We hope this information will be helpful to assist the soccer player in your life in achieving their peak performances during practice, game times, and tournaments.

The Warren County Health and Fitness Committee

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