

Nutrition for Soccer

Good nutrition is needed so players will have the energy needed to last the entire game. Food is the energy source to make it happen, but not just any food. It has to be the right kind of food. Here is some information to help with not only game day but during tournaments where we may play 3 games in one day so nutrition will be key. You should always listen to what your mom told you about eating a balanced diet. Rule one is never to skip breakfast. Doing so will rob and starve your body making it difficult to make up for the lost fuel. During tournaments do not skip a meal. In fact, you may wish to add an extra meal or two. The players will need lots and lots of calories.

Wrong kinds of food – Heavily processed/junk food is not the right kind of energy source. Candy is also a no-no – it is a quick high and a fast bad low. In fact these types of food can be an energy drain on the body during a practice or a game, so stay away from this stuff.

Proteins – Proteins are good at night after games/practices. Proteins are used by the body to build muscle, so it is not a good fuel. The primary sources of protein are beef, poultry, and fish. Save the proteins for after the game to rebuild muscle and your body.

Carbohydrates & Fats – This is what is needed to build the energy store needed for the game and tournaments. There are two types of Carbs – simple & complex. The body will generally use carbs and fats in the following order: simple carbs; complex carbs; and then fats.

- Simple carbohydrates are found in foods such as fruits (apple, orange, banana, etc). Simple carbs are easiest for your body to incorporate and use to fuel you in the game. These are good but will generally be used up before the game is done. Grab fruit for an instant boost.
- Complex carbohydrates are found in foods such as grains (whole wheat), bread, muffins, bagels. These are the foods the body will turn to next once the simple carbs have been used up.
- Fats – Fats have a high energy density which is why the body turns to it once the carbs have been used up. Examples of fats are cream cheese, peanut butter, string cheese, etc. Nuts are an excellent source of fat.

The approach is to layer the foods in the order they will be used. First eat simple carbs, then complex carbs, and then fats. You can do a complex carb/fat combo such as bagels and cream cheese, bagel & peanut butter, or a peanut butter sandwich (with a little jelly for taste). Combining complex carbs with fats will help sustain maximum energy levels. So a good pre-game meal a couple of hours before the game might be an apple followed by a bagel with peanut butter with a side of nut mix all washed down with H₂O.

Hydration – Water is best, so drink plenty of water. Drink, Drink, Drink! It is easy to not get enough fluid if drinking sports drinks as they can fill you up before you have replaced the H₂O lost during a game or practice. If you must have a sports drink, then a 70/30 split (H₂O /sports drink) is the maximum I would recommend.

Tournaments & Game Days – First thing to do for tournaments is to hydrate. Not just on the days of the games, but for several days prior to the first game. One source I found about hydration recommended drink 1-2 liters of water a day the week leading up to a tournament. A couple of hours before a game, start with the simple carbs followed by a complex carb/fat combo along with plenty of H₂O. The amount of carb/fat combo will depend on your size. A bagel with peanut butter or cream cheese with a side of nut mix is usually sufficient. Now give the food some time to digest. If after 20 minutes you are still not full, you can skip the fruit and have another fat/carb combo. Don't over do it and make sure you give your body some time to digest. Be careful on going to a restaurant for a big breakfast or lunch before or after a game. Try to keep with the routine as much as possible for the high energy foods that will give the players the fuel needed to last the entire game. Go for the protein with diner to help rebuild the body and muscles.

Half-time snacks – First thing is plenty of water – we will need to replace the fluids lost during the game. Good items for half-time are fresh fruit, bagels/fat combos, PB&J, nut mixes, etc.

Transitioning to High Energy Foods – If you currently do not use these types of high energy foods, it would be best to work up to it before starting to play games. Some people may have digestive problems if you try to do this just on game day because your body is not used to high energy foods. Work your way up to the high energy format if you find you have problems.