

Championship Choices

How eating well means winning results

Character. Commitment. Perseverance - These are crucial concepts that are instilled in student athletes as the foundation of a winning team. But what about terms like Carbohydrate. Calcium. Protein - Are they viewed as equally important?

Athletic development often focuses on improving mindset through motivation and strength through training. But without proper nutrition, mental focus and performance never really reach their full potential. Young athletes need to “fuel the furnace” and keep their bodies both primed with energy and rehydrated at all times for workouts and competition.

Nutrition habits greatly affect daily training, game day performances and more importantly overall health. With calorie needs that are at least 10 - 15% higher than those of their peers, children who participate in sports need extra food to fuel their activities. **Coaches should avoid counting calories or restricting food groups, encourage nutrient rich choices** from the five food groups - fruit, vegetables, whole grains, protein and low-fat dairy - and focus on the following nutrition principles:

High Caliber Hydration

Dehydration is the most common nutritional cause of poor performance, but it's also the most preventable. Additionally, new research points to re-hydration as an equally important concept.

Start well-hydrated - About 30 minutes before, drink 2-3 cups of non-caffeinated fluids.

Don't rely on thirst - An athlete is already dehydrated once he or she becomes thirsty. Encourage at least 1 cup of fluid for every 15 to 20 minutes of activity until exercise is completed.

Replace electrolytes - Electrolytes are salts and minerals that help maintain fluid balance for proper body functioning. Through sweating, bodies lose electrolytes - like sodium, calcium, potassium and magnesium. It's especially important that teen athletes replenish these minerals, as they are key components of bone growth and development.

Top Quality Calories

Carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy. A typical young athlete's engine runs hot enough to burn fats and protein, but prefers carbohydrates. Encourage young athletes to **bench “empty calorie” choices**, such as soft drinks, energy drinks, candy bars & pastries. Choose a **starting line-up** of complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, breads, fruits, vegetables, and beans, which take longer to digest, keeping athletes full and focused.

Protein reduces muscle breakdown and stimulates growth. Research shows it also works with carbohydrates to help replenish the energy stores in depleted muscles and fight fatigue after exercise.

B vitamins, found in whole grain breads and cereals, are a complex of vitamins that help the body “unlock” the energy in foods. **Calcium** helps keep bones strong and aids in proper muscle contraction. **Vitamin D** aids calcium (along with phosphorus, protein and potassium) in keeping bones strong and helping prevent stress fractures. Adolescents and teens need 3 servings each day of milk, cheese or yogurt - rich sources of most of these nutrients.

Iron and **Zinc** are minerals that help support immune function, as well as supporting oxygen transport (Iron) and muscle building (Zinc). Both are found in meat, poultry, seafood, nuts and whole grains.

Most Valuable Player

When it comes to nutritious drink choices, milk is considered the **Most Valuable Player**. In addition to carbohydrates and protein, milk and low-fat chocolate milk contain essential vitamins and minerals, such as calcium, potassium and vitamin D - three of the four nutrients young athletes are lacking. In fact, **low-fat chocolate milk**, a taste favorite at any training table, naturally contains many of the nutrients commercial sport drinks artificially add in.

Studies show that low-fat chocolate milk **replenishes and rebuilds muscles** to help athletes recover. Plus, it has the added bonus of bone building nutrients (not found in traditional sports drinks). One cup of low-fat chocolate milk for every hour of exercise is the standard recommendation.

To make these **Championship Choices** a reality for your team,
try the following snack combinations

Pre -Exercise	Post-exercise	Team Cooler
Oatmeal with brown sugar and nuts + milk + banana	Turkey and Swiss sandwich + low-fat chocolate milk	Water and low-fat chocolate milk
Smoothie made with milk, yogurt and frozen fruit + granola	Tuna sandwich + fruit & yogurt parfait	Trail mix of whole-grain cereal, pretzels, dried fruit & nuts + low-fat milk
Whole-grain waffle with almond butter and raisins + drinkable yogurt	Tortilla with grilled chicken + cheese + grilled veggies	Whole-grain granola bar with peanut butter + low-fat chocolate milk + banana