

# Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

## Healthy eating for sporting events

There is no single, miracle food that will help children perform well at a sporting event. Instead, good nutrition before, during and after the event will help children feel stronger, train harder and compete better. The foods and beverages offered should help to prevent the feeling of hunger; to supply fuel to the working muscles; and, to prevent dehydration.




Most active grade schoolers will get the nutrients and energy they need by following the recommendations made in Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Plan meals and snacks that include a variety of foods from the food groups in Canada's Food Guide. For more information on the food guide visit [www.canadasfoodguide.net](http://www.canadasfoodguide.net). On event day, and every day, ensure that your child starts with a healthy breakfast, and packs at least two snacks and a healthy lunch in their backpack. Provide foods that your children like and that contain lots of nutrients. A healthy meal plan for an all day sporting event:



- Has plenty of carbohydrate choices (e.g., whole grain breads, cereals, pasta, beans, lentils, vegetables, fruit, milk, and yogurt). Carbohydrate provides the energy that fuels active muscles and delays the onset of fatigue during the event
- Includes protein to build and repair body tissues (e.g., meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk products, beans, lentils)
- Limits foods high in fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt (e.g., chocolate bars, chips, hot dogs)

**Blast off with breakfast!** A high-carbohydrate breakfast provides energy for practices or games later in the day. Include three of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide. Any combination that your child enjoys is fine... even spaghetti and meatballs! Add orange juice and yogurt for a nutritionally balanced meal.

### Breakfast Ideas

-  Scrambled eggs, toast, strawberries, milk
-  Cheese, whole wheat bagel, banana, vegetable juice
-  Whole grain cereal, milk, blueberries and water

### Before and after the sporting event...

If the time between lunch and the activity is more than two hours children need a nutritious low fat snack (e.g., fruit cup and an oatmeal muffin) before the activity. Provide familiar foods that your child will tolerate well. When your child is finished the activity, ensure they have something to drink to rehydrate and a healthy, low fat snack to eat (e.g., banana and yogurt).

**Team snacks...** If you're asked to bring a snack for the team after an activity (e.g., soccer or hockey), it may be tempting to bring ice cream, cookies and donuts but these are poor choices for sport recovery. The best snacks are those that will help young athletes replace energy, fluids and other nutrients lost during the exercise. For ideas on what to bring, refer to the list on the back of this page.



**Water, water and more water!** Drinking enough fluids is important for active children. Children have a poor sense of thirst and often need to be reminded to drink. Parents and coaches need to encourage active children to drink... before, during and after the activity or event, even though they may not feel thirsty! Children tend to drink more fluids if they are flavoured. For sporting events and practices dilute fruit juice with an equal amount of water or add frozen cubes of fruit juice to water.



## Rethink your drink!

**What about sports drinks?** Although sports drinks are popular, they have been designed for professional athletes to help prevent dehydration through sweating from vigorous exercise. In general they are unnecessary for children unless they are completing at least 60 minutes of vigorous activity and even then diluted fruit juice or a drink of water with a fruit will also work.



**Aren't energy drinks like sports drinks? NO!** Energy drinks should not be confused with sports drinks such as Gatorade® or Powerade®. Energy drinks contain too much caffeine for children and teens and may make them anxious and irritable. More nutritious and safe beverage choices for active children are water, milk and 100% unsweetened fruit juices.

## Healthy snack and lunch ideas for the young athlete

Try...	Instead of...
Whole wheat bagels, bread or pita	Doughnuts or packaged snack cakes
Fresh fruit (e.g., watermelon, orange wedges)	Commercial cream filled cookies or cookies dunked in icing
*Dried fruit (e.g., dates, apricots) or *100% fruit leathers	Fruit roll-ups or fruit snacks
100% fruit juice	Fruit drinks, energy drinks or sports drinks
Low fat whole grain muffins	Regular commercially-prepared muffins
Pretzels, plain popcorn or breadsticks	Potato chips, corn chips or butter coated popcorn
Chicken or tuna salad tortilla wraps	Nachos
Low fat granola bars with dried fruit	Granola bars with chocolate or marshmallows
Mini rice cakes	Cheese puffs or rice krispie squares

\*It is recommended that dried fruit be eaten as part of a meal due to risk of dental decay.

For more information about nutrition requirements for competitive athletes, please speak to a dietitian who specializes in sports nutrition and/or visit [www.coach.ca](http://www.coach.ca).