

NUTRITION MATTERS

HEALTHY EATING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN SPORTS

Being physically active through sport teaches children valuable skills and helps to form healthy habits that can carry into adulthood. Unfortunately, children may be exposed to unhealthy foods and food messages during sports. As a coach or parent, you have the opportunity to support physical activity and healthy eating.

Before sports

If the time between a meal and a sporting event (game, practice or competition) is more than two hours, children need a nutritious low fat snack (e.g. fruit and a small oatmeal muffin or slice of toast with peanut butter and a small banana) before the activity. Provide familiar and healthy foods that children will eat.

A healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner will provide energy for practices or games later in the day. Include at least three of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide. Some meal ideas include:

- Scrambled eggs, whole wheat bagel, strawberries, glass of water
- Whole wheat toast, cheese, banana, glass of milk
- Whole grain crackers, hummus, cut raw vegetables, glass of milk

- Turkey, vegetable and cheese sandwich, a piece of fruit, glass of water
- For more information visit [Canada's Food Guide](#)

Hydration during sports

It is important to keep young athletes hydrated during physical activity, especially in hot weather. Water is the best choice for kids. Sports drinks, fruit drinks, juice, pop, energy drinks and vitamin-enhanced waters contain a lot of sugar and are not a healthy choice for children. In fact, they may even cause stomach upset during activity. Instead, ensure you have a reusable water bottle with your child's name on it and encourage drinking water before, during and after physical activity.



PUBLIC HEALTH

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After sports

When children are finished an activity, ensure they have water to rehydrate. Depending on the time of the day, it may be a good idea to

offer a healthy snack, however a team snack is not always necessary.

Avoid snacks like cookies, doughnuts, snack cakes, chocolate bars, energy bars, chips and fruit drinks.

These foods have limited nutritional quality and are often given as “rewards” or “treats” after sports. This creates an unhealthy association between being active and eating unhealthy foods. Also, kids are more likely to eat these unhealthy foods, even if they are not hungry.

DO CHILDREN NEED SPORTS DRINKS?

Water and a balanced diet give most children the energy and fluids they need. Sports drinks add sugar and calories with little nutritional value. They are not needed by children involved in sports of lower intensity and duration, or doing routine physical activity for less than one hour. Regular water breaks every 15 to 20 minutes and enjoying water and a healthy snack after a game is adequate.

Children may not recognize the need to replace fluids and often need reminders to drink. Some children will drink more fluids if they are flavoured. For sporting events and practices, add sliced fruit (e.g., lemons, limes or oranges) or frozen cubes of fruit juice to water.

Team snacks

Some teams may organize snacks after practices or games. While it is an opportunity to socialize with team members, often these snacks are mostly unhealthy. If the team has snacks, consider being an example for healthy living by providing healthy snacks when it is your turn. See below for some healthy snack ideas.

HEALTHY SNACK IDEAS FOR YOUR TEAM OR CHILD

- Fresh cut fruit (watermelon, oranges, apples, bananas, grapes, apricots)
- Sliced vegetables with dip or hummus
- Cheese and whole grain crackers or mini whole grain pitas
- Unsweetened applesauce pouches
- Sliced vegetables and cheese
- Nut free trail mix: dried fruit mixed with whole grain cereal

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY EATING ENVIRONMENT

- Create a healthy eating or snack policy for your local team
- Encourage your sports league to adopt a healthy eating policy. This outlines a commitment to healthy eating and supports healthy food choices.
- Advocate for healthier options in local recreation centres or concessions
- Be a role model. Model healthy behaviours at games and practices.

ELITE ATHLETES

The elite athlete who is training multiple hours, most days of the week may have different nutrient and hydration requirements. For more information about nutrition requirements for competitive athletes, please speak to a registered dietitian who specializes in sports nutrition and/or visit coach.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or by going on www.unlockfood.ca