

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 an oatmeal muffin) before the activity. Provide familiar and healthy foods that children will eat.

A healthy breakfast and lunch will provide energy for practices or games later in the day. Include three of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide. Some breakfast or lunch 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 www.canadasfoodguide.net

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 enhanced waters contain a lot of sugar and are not a healthy choice for children. Instead, ensure access to a labelled, reusable water bottle and encourage drinking water before, during and after physical activity.

After sports

When children are finished an activity, ensure they have water to drink 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.



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

Speak to a registered dietitian at no cost by calling EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 or by going to ontario.ca/eatright

