

PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK

Fueling for the Football Season

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Football is a game of strength, speed, and skill – all of which can be affected by what, when, and how much an athlete eats and drinks. Athletes need to apply the same effort to proper fueling as they give during practices and competition. Players sometimes neglect nutrition, which can result in poor performance.

Common Nutrition Mistakes

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not eating at regular intervals
- Eating too much protein and short-changing carbohydrates

Setting Nutrition Goals

With a little education, football players can make changes that will be felt both on and off the field. The team should set nutrition goals together, such as:

- Drinking on a schedule
- Refueling at halftime
- Eating immediately after practices or games

What to Eat

Football players need carbohydrate to fuel hard-working muscles. Bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables should be the bulk of a football player's diet filling up 2/3 of the plate at every meal. Protein foods, such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, nuts, soy products, and beans, are essential to good health but are not the primary fuel source for exercise. They should occupy only 1/3 of the plate. There is no need for fancy supplements or protein powders, since well-chosen foods and fluids are the tastiest, least expensive, and most efficient way to fuel the body.

All-Day Fueling

Unlike professional football players who practice during the day, younger athletes don't take the field or hit the gym until after school. Since bodies don't run well on empty, eating

every 3 to 4 hours is necessary to properly fuel both the body and mind. Encourage your athletes to:

- Eat within 1 hour of waking up.
- Eat something at lunch.
- Before practice, drink a sports drink or eat an energy bar, cereal, or granola bar.
- Bring a post-exercise snack to eat before leaving the locker room. Good choices include an energy bar, bagel, crackers, or fruit with a sports drink.

Drink Up!

All players benefit when the body is optimally hydrated. This is not just a game-day issue, but a daily priority. To prevent dehydration, especially in hot, humid environments, athletes need to drink often and enough. Get your athletes off to the right start by:

- Recommending sports drinks over water, because sports drinks taste great, contain electrolytes, like sodium, and may help prevent cramping.
- Weighing players before and after practices to determine individual fluid losses and monitoring them to replace every pound lost with at least 20 to 24 ounces of fluid.
- Asking athletes to bring their own sports bottles and drinks so that their favorite fluid is readily available.
- Reminding athletes that spitting doesn't hydrate the body.
- Educating players to check the color of their urine. If it's pale like lemonade, that's a sign of good hydration. If it's dark like apple juice, they need more fluids.

