



Mindful Sports Nutrition

“You can do a lot to optimize growth, like feeding your athlete healthy food most of the time and making sure he or she is getting enough sleep.” – Jill Castle, MS, RDN, CDN

Imagine having just signed your first professional contract and buying your dream car. Now imagine going to start the engine and instead of hearing a powerful roar you hear a pattering whimper. Why? Because instead of high octane fuel you decided to put water in the gas tank because it was cheaper and more convenient. Here you are with an incredible car but with the wrong fuel source. How far will you get?

Your body is no different. Your body is a sports car. Yet, by feeding it the wrong fuel you'll never tap into the potential it holds. What we put into our bodies we get out of our bodies. If we eat poorly we perform poorly. It is not uncommon to grab fast food on the way to a tournament or see buckets of seeds and bubble gum in dugouts as snacks. Yet, are those really the fuel of success? Or just convenience? One of the quickest ways to improve performance is to improve your nutrition.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF POOR NUTRITION: If athletes eat poorly, they put themselves at risk for nutritional deficiencies that will impact more than just their performance. Malnourishment or nutritional deficiencies can hinder the healthy growth and development of strong bodies and minds long term. Specifically, according to registered dietician, Jill Castle, author of [Eat Like A Champion](#), “chronic under-eating may lead to short stature, delayed puberty, irregular menstrual periods for girls, poor bone health, and a higher risk of injuries” (pg. 19).

WHERE THE CALORIES GO: Sleep burns about 50% of a young athletes calories and they go to rebuilding muscles after exercise, making new tissue, pumping blood throughout the body, and using the lungs to breathe. The other 50% of our calories fuel us for movement and thinking throughout the day.

CALORIC INTAKE FOR SUCCESS: According to Castle, when practicing or playing for more than 2 hours:

- Females should be eating around 2-35 calories per pound of body weight
- Males should be eating around 25-30 calories per pound of body weight

Example: Johnny weighs 75lbs so 25 calories x 75lbs = 1875 calories per day.

These numbers are not exact but they are a good general estimate of a youth athlete's nutritional needs. Each athlete is unique and their exact nutritional needs will vary by age, sport demands, genetics, and developmental stage. The older that child gets the more calories he or she will need to consume.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NUTRITION:

#1 Drink Water: Your body is anywhere between 75-85% water. Most workouts cause you to lose 2lbs of water in sweat. Drink water constantly and bring a big jug with you wherever you go. If you are thirsty, you've waited too long. Your pee should be white every morning when you wake up. Aim for around 100oz of water daily. Dehydration can lead to overheating and other injuries.

#2 Own Your Nutrition Knowledge or Get Help: You wouldn't trust anyone to inject you with something you were unfamiliar with would you? Well, you may be ingesting food that you have no idea the impact it's having on your body. Take an interest in your nutrition and the role of the three macronutrients **carbohydrates** (65% of athlete diet – quick fuel source), **fats** (long term fuel source and brain function necessity) and **proteins** (muscle builder) in your body. Seek out a sports nutritionist to build a meal plan for victory.

#3 Meal Planning: Plan out meals for the whole week and consider cooking in bulk early in the week. It will save you time and money and you'll have the reassurance in knowing you're putting the right fuel in.

#4 Pack Fuel Snacks: Instead of binging at night and in the morning with nothing during the day, bring snacks with you for fuel throughout the day: Dried fruit, nuts, candy bars, protein bars, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and jerky are great sources of quick fuel and sugar to aid mental and physical performance.

#5 Be Present: Athletes often eat on the go or in large groups together and do not actually pay attention to how much they eat or what they are eating. It's just as important to be present during meals as it is in the game. Taste each bite and put your silverware down between bites.

#6 Know Your Environment: We eat differently around different groups (faster/slower, more/less, better/worse) and in different environments (loud setting/quiet setting).

#7 Eat for Performance not Perfection: Athletes in sports where weight (wrestling, boxing, MMA) or physical appearance (gymnastics, swimming) plays a major role in sport tend to eat for perfection rather than performance. Consider this: What does it matter what you look like if you cannot go out and perform the way you need to perform? The dangers of anorexia and bulimia have short and long term mental and physical effects that can ruin the proper function of your mind and body. Seek out professional assistance if you feel at risk.

#8 Cheat Meal: If you feel you have to be too rigid with your eating you need to reconsider enjoying the pleasures of life occasionally and at the appropriate times. After all, you are human. And, it's been shown that a fun cheat meal once in awhile helps with:

- Long term adherence to healthy eating by being realistic about nutrition
- Forces the body to regenerating your calorie burning mechanisms when foreign foods enter

Some food for thought from a famous athlete: "Just because you love cheeseburgers doesn't mean you have to prove it everyday!"

RESOURCES: For more information on sports nutrition specifics, consider the following:

- Youth Sport: *Eat Like a Champion* by Jill Castle
- All ages: *Sports Nutrition Guidebook* by Nancy Clark (look for newest edition)

YOUR TURN - TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CAREER:

What is the importance of nutrition to your ability to perform at your best in life and in sport?

What are some obstacles to eating well for you? (lack of knowledge of what to eat when; body image peer pressure; lack of planning; lack of resources; laziness, etc)

What are a few strategies you could implement to help you eat well consistently: (ie: meal prep/planning; packing proper snacks...)