

# Nutrition Considerations for Student Athletes

## What do athletes want?

- To go fast
- To be strong
- To build muscle
- To sharpen skills/gain an edge or advantage
- To have energy/feel good
- To increase stamina/improve time
- To be healthy

The needs of the student athlete are **unique**. Because of the increase in training (physical activity) during sports seasons, the student can become **run down** and **susceptible to illness** if they do not properly monitor nutrition. Without changing their pre-season diet during the training period, the athlete will not get the maximum results from their effort. A student, who goes from relative inactivity to training for a sport, will find themselves struggling if they do not increase their calories and choice of fuel. The body will get energy from where ever it can. If you are not meeting the body's needs through your food choices, it can take what it needs from your bone and mineral stores. This creates an unhealthy condition in your body.

Student athletes are still growing and their bodies are changing. **During this important time emphasis must be placed on proper fuel.** Fuel=food. If you had a Ferrari you would be sure to fuel it with top quality fuel not junky fillers and questionable fuel sources. But most students don't consider what they are fueling their bodies with. Garbage in garbage out! Don't think you must give up your favorite foods, but consider what you can add to create nutrition at each eating episode. Your focus needs to be adding more nutrition, more high performance fuel. This will give you an edge on the competition and allow your body to perform at its maximum. Solid nutrition allows you to build muscle the way putting Miracle Grow™ on plants helps them to thrive. It is about giving your body the fuel it needs to really grow. At this time of growth and development, nutrition is a major factor in your overall performance and wellness.

**Problem:** Not drinking enough water, if any at all.

**Solution:** Keep options handy! Plan ahead! Find ways to disguise the taste with "cool" pour in flavors or flavored waters. Nothing beats plain and natural water. Water is to your body like oil is to your car's engine. It keeps things running smooth. You would not run your car without oil, but you often choose to run your body without the vital water your cells need to thrive. Get a special bottle to keep your water in or other way to remind yourself to drink. Fill a two-liter bottle with water daily and don't stop until it's gone.

**Problem:** Skipping Breakfast.

**Solution:** Breakfast does not have to be a heavy meal. Look at it as your "Metabolism Booster!" Think of it as simply adding nutritious calories, versus eating a morning meal. If you were told you could take a purchased supplement every morning and it would increase your performance, endurance and metabolism, would you? Well you can, and it is called breakfast. Bottom line is: if you want to have that performance edge, you will start fueling your body every morning. This can be a variety of easy to eat portable

snacks, fortified cereals or even a meal replacement type shake, but read the label for content first. Look for balanced nutrition, low sugar & good protein content. Ideally look for a simple carbohydrate source and a quick digesting protein source. Your body goes all night without food, this slows your metabolism, which lowers your optimal body functioning. It is only when you consume nutritious calories that your body starts to rev up for the day. No AM fuel, equals reduced performance. So eat to win, and train your body with your nutrition and water intake, the same way you train your muscles with weights or your lungs with cardio. Proper nutrition and hydration will make your body perform at its peak production. That should be the goal of any true athlete. Treat your body like the machine it is! So in the morning ask yourself do you want to be a Ferrari or a Pinto, the choice is yours.

**Problem:** Lack of consistent protein and sporadic eating with long gaps without food. (Avoid gaps of more than 3-4 hours without food and aim for a protein source each time) Protein is essential for muscle growth, energy, red blood cell formation and strength. It keeps blood sugar stable and sustains energy levels.

**Solution:** Plan ahead! Keep several protein snack options handy in your locker, gym bag, car or purse. If it is not handy, you won't eat it. Examples: peanuts, peanut butter crackers, trail mix, beef jerky and protein snack bars. When available drink milk, eat yogurt, cheese sticks, cheese and crackers or eggs. Adding any of these options to what you already eat is a start. Consider building meals around these foods.

**Problem:** Not knowing how to fuel your body. "What to eat" & "When to eat it."

**Solution:** There are two main times of day to take in simple carbohydrates: first thing in the morning and after your practice, training or a game. Breakfast because your body needs to raise your blood sugar from going so many hours without food and when you're done with a heavy workout because this starts the recovery and muscle growth process. A hard workout depletes stored glycogen (sugar), so your body will want to replace it. A little insulin spike (from the carbs or sugar) can help increase protein synthesis immediately after a workout, but be sensible in your choices. Rapidly digestible proteins, such as whey protein powder, some simple carbs and some complex carbs are an ideal combo for post workout nutrition.

**Problem:** Lack of vital nutrients from multiple food groups (Aim for at least one fruit or vegetable at every meal). It is something you will have to *do intentionally*. Look for these foods and don't rely on corn and peas because they are "starchy" vegetables. Your body uses each food group differently and they are ALL needed for balanced nutrition.

**Solution:** Keep several options in your cabinet at home and pack any that are portable, apples, carrots, cauliflower and other easy to keep items. Dip is ok, cheese is ok, dressing is ok, just get the nutritious food your body needs. **Consider it a training supplement!**

**Problem:** Too much caffeine.

**Solution:** Use it wisely. Caffeine is a legal drug. Caffeine draws water from your body's cells and thus will dehydrate you. Consider how much you take in and ways to cut back. Energy drinks may be cool, but they pack too much caffeine and calories for any health benefit. In fact too much could be hard on your heart and actually decrease performance. Taken too close to bedtime and your mind will continue spinning while your body may be tired. Sleep is when your body rejuvenates its cells and replenishes your vital stores.

Lack of proper sleep will also decrease performance and make you more likely to get sick. Being run-down from lack of sleep also slows injury healing.

### The “Top Ten” Nutrition Secrets for Athletes

Athletes have greater demands placed on their bodies and as a result they must taken greater measures to ensure they meet those demands. Student athletes are at even greater risk for deficiencies due to the growth and hormonal changes also taking place. This is a top ten look at ways you can tackle nutrition head on!

1. Take a daily multi-vitamin and mineral supplement. Ensure adequate amounts of Vitamin C, Vitamin E, B Complex, and Folic Acid. Consider Vitamin C that is esterized, Vitamin E with mixed tocopherols and a vitamin and mineral supplement that has been chelated. Look for minerals as amino acid chelates. Important minerals to consider would be Calcium, Magnesium, Potassium, Zinc, Manganese, Chromium and Selenium.
2. Remember, **a meal is eating two or more nutritious foods at one sitting**. At a minimum, it should consist of a complex carb and a protein. Aim for two different colored fruits or veggies at each sitting. Eat upon waking up, after exercise and take in health nutrition (100-300 calories) every three to four hours.
3. Drink water all day long. Hydrate more on hot days or when sweating a great deal. Avoid caffeine in the evening, and use it wisely prior to workouts, games or practices.
4. Practice your KISS: “Keep It Simple Stupid.” Having multiple food options is *not necessary* to constitute a meal. People tend to eat more, the more options they have, so keep it simple, basic and as natural as possible.
5. Add more nutritional value to common foods. Consider products such as whey protein powder, flaxseed meal and wheat germ as non-flavor health additives to your recipes, cereal, yogurt and smoothies. Pureed fruits or veggies can also be snuck into regular recipes. Gear your mind toward **adding** more nutrition to each eating episode. Think of healthful additions to round out meals.
6. Look to add more fiber through complex carbs and fruits and vegetables. Fiber acts like little brooms, sweeping out the digestive tract. Carefully evaluate the **first five** ingredients listed to ensure the actual “whole grain” content.
7. Think more *brown* and less *white*. Try whole grain options in your bread, crackers, pasta, and flour. Choose brown rice over white and dense carbs over light and airy. Food = Fuel, what do you want to fuel your body with?
8. For a mental boost, try a baked potato *with the skin* before bed (3 hours after last meal). It helps the body raise your serotonin level. It creates an insulin response, which has an effect on the movement of the amino acid tryptophan from your blood into the brain. Choose *any* non-protein toppings and **eat the skin**.
9. Plan grocery shopping with a protein to balance principle in mind. For every 15 grams of carbs you eat, try to eat 7 grams of protein (P2B Ratio). Create easy to grab snack and take along meals for easy access. Make several servings ahead of time and freeze in individual serving sizes. This saves time when in a crunch. Often those easy to grab – shelf stable foods will clog up your digestion, reduce your performance and decrease your fitness status.
10. Make it easier on yourself, by planning ahead when you have time. Have your go-to nutritious snack combinations either written down or thought up, for always ready snack ideas. As always, plan ahead. Prior preparation prevents poor performance!