

Food and Nutrition

The Food Groups

Your diet will need to be high in complex carbohydrates. It will need to have moderate amounts of protein, salt, sugars, and sodium. It should be low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.

All this may sound quite complicated. Yet in fact it is quite simple. You can easily follow the guidelines by eating in a balanced way, including a variety of foods from each of the five major food groups that nutritionists recognize grains, vegetables, fruits, milk and meat.

- **Carbohydrates**

Active, soccer-playing kids should get around 50 to 60% of their total calories in the form of carbohydrates they are the fuel that makes your muscles go. That means around 3.0 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight. Carbohydrates should be the largest part of your meals both before training or a game and after. You should even plan to boost your carbohydrate intake during a game with a sports drink, which is also important for re-hydration.

The best type of carbohydrates are rich in nutrients and obtained from complex (starchy) carbohydrates found in vegetables, breads, cereals, pasta, and rice, rather than the simple (sweet) carbohydrates found in milk and fruits

- **Protein**

Many people mistakenly think that a diet rich in the protein found in milk and meat helps build muscle and physical performance. In fact a well balanced diet has only 10 to 15% of its calories in the form of protein. Excess protein will stress the Kidneys and lead to dehydration and calcium loss. Muscle size is dependent on sufficient calories from a balanced diet, physical maturity, training and genetics.

- **Fat**

Fat in moderation remains an important part of a balanced diet for a soccer player, and around 20 to 30% of your calories should come from fat. Fat is important for many of your functions. It is a secondary source of energy to fuel your muscles and is essential for brain and nerve function. Fat provides essential vitamins A, E, D, K and omega3 fatty acids which help you recover quickly by reducing inflammation and swelling when you get injured.

Tips on eating and drinking before and after a game

Build up your calorie intake in the days leading up to a game to ensure your muscles contain a good store of glycogen the agent that powers you.

On the day of a game remember that soccer is a stop and go sport that requires fluids and carbohydrates throughout the day of the game.

The night before and 2 hours before a game focus on carbohydrates, moderate protein, low fat foods and fluids (pasta with vegetables and chicken, fruit, skimmed milk, cereal, yoghurt, toast, juice).

Help your muscles recover fast eat and/or drink a high carbohydrate snack within 30 minutes after the game.

Young people have different fluid needs to an adult and are more likely to get overheated when playing in hot weather, although fluid loss should also be replenished during cold weather.

Studies show that sports drinks are more effective and often more readily taken than water as a preventative for fatigue and dehydration.

You should drink around 5 to 9 ounces of a suitable fluid every 20 minutes or so during a game or during training, and keep drinking after exercise even if you do not feel thirsty.

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