



## Nutritional guidelines for your student athlete

### Why is nutrition important for athletes?

What your student athlete eats is the fuel source for their activity. If they fuel their body with nutritious foods, it will perform better, become less fatigued and reduce their risk for injury. It is also important to choose healthy foods year round, not just during the sports season or the day of a big game. Consistently eating well is the best game plan to ensure that your student athlete performs at their best.

### What should my student athlete be eating?

As a parent it is important that you encourage your student athlete to eat a well balanced diet. This means eating a wide variety of foods from all the food groups including dairy foods, grains, meat and beans, fruits and vegetables. Eating a wide variety of foods helps to ensure that your student athlete's body gets the nutrients that it needs for proper growth and development and optimal health and performance. (For more specific information regarding your student athlete's calorie and nutrient needs, visit: [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).)



**Grains:** This food group provides a source of carbohydrate, which is the bodies preferred energy source for fueling activity. At least half of grain servings should come from whole grains such as 100% whole grain breads and pastas, brown rice, oats, barley, quinoa, and popcorn. Refined grains do not supply the fiber and other nutrients that whole grains do.



**Meat and beans:** This food group is a good source of protein which is needed by the body for many functions such as proper growth, tissue and muscle repair, transporting nutrients and muscle contraction. Encourage lean meats such as poultry, fish, pork, and lean cuts of red meat. Nuts, seeds, and beans are also excellent sources of protein. Although protein is an important nutrient, excess protein, beyond recommended levels, is not necessary for athletes and will not help to build more muscle. The only way to build muscle is through athletic training.



**Fruits and Vegetables:** These two food groups also provide our bodies with carbohydrate for energy. In addition, fruits and vegetables provide many nutrients that are important for health and preventing chronic disease. When selecting fruits and vegetables, variety is important. Encourage your student athlete to fill their plate with brightly colored fruits and vegetables. Generally, the darker the color, the more nutrients it contains.



**Dairy:** Dairy foods provide a good source of both carbohydrate and protein. Some dairy foods also provide fat although there are many low-fat and fat-free options. Dairy foods include milk, cheese and yogurt. Dairy foods contain many important nutrients and provide many health benefits including bone health, dental health, heart health and others. Physical activity is important for bone health but bones also need calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients found in dairy foods to be strong and prevent breaks and fractures.



**Oils:** Oils provide our body with a source of fat. In addition to carbohydrate, fat is an energy source for our body. Because fat is a more concentrated energy source, it is especially effective for fueling activities of longer duration such as marathon running. Fat is also important for normal growth and development, transporting vitamins throughout the body and providing essential fatty acids. The majority of fat in your student athlete's diet should come from healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats that exist in oils, such as canola, olive, peanut, and soybean oils. Nuts, seeds, and fatty fish are also excellent sources of healthy oils.

## Training Tips

- ▶ **Before the Game:** Choose a light meal or snack that is easy to digest and is rich in carbohydrates, moderate in protein and low in fat. Your student athlete may need to experiment with different foods to find those that work best for them. Finish eating 1-4 hours before your athlete's competition to allow plenty of time for the meal or snack to be digested and to avoid discomfort.
- ▶ **During the Game:** Your student athlete should focus on staying hydrated. Inadequate fluid intake may result in dehydration, which can result in cramps, dizziness, heat exhaustion, or even heat stroke. A general rule of thumb is to listen to your body and drink when thirsty. Encourage your student athlete to drink some fluids every 15-20 minutes. If they are exercising in the heat they may need more.
- ▶ **After the Game:** After their event it is time to replace the fluids and energy that were lost. It is important that athletes continue to drink fluids throughout the day to rehydrate their body. Also encourage another carbohydrate-rich meal or snack that also contains protein to help replenish muscle glycogen stores and repair muscles.

## Milk's Role in Hydration and Recovery

Emerging research shows that white or flavored milk is an ideal beverage to drink after exercise because every serving contains the nutrition needed to promote effective recovery after exercise. These nutrients include:

- Carbohydrates to refuel muscles
- Protein to reduce muscle breakdown and stimulate growth
- Fluid and electrolytes to replenish what is lost in sweat and to rehydrate the body
- Calcium, vitamin D and phosphorus to promote, maintain and build strong bones
- B vitamins to aid in converting food to energy to fuel working muscles
- Potassium to help with fluid and mineral balance and help muscles contract

## Sports Supplements: Too Good To Be True?

As the parent of a student athlete you may wonder about the safety of sports supplements. Despite many claims made by the supplement industry, these products provide little to no benefit and may have potentially harmful side effects. The only safe and effective way to improve performance and strength is by eating a healthy diet and properly training.

Source: Complete Food and Nutrition Guide, American Dietetic Association, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

Emerging research shows that drinking milk can be an effective way to help the body refuel and recover after exercise.

