

Soccer Food

Nutritional advice for Soccer players, parents and coaches:

Sports nutrition, diet and food and drink for soccer players are becoming increasingly scientific and recognized for its importance in the game of soccer.

Almost every professional soccer club has a nutritionist or similar expert advisor for their team.

This article covers the most important principles of sport nutrition for amateur players and coaches.

Why is sport nutrition or diet important in soccer?

- 1 Food provides us with energy for our body including: muscles, brain and other organs. Soccer requires plenty of exercise, and therefore it is important to have energy available to us during training sessions or the game. The energy available to us at any particular time depends on our blood sugar levels.
- 2 If we over-eat, we become over-weight. The heavier we are, the more work our muscles have to do to take us the same distance. This reduces our stamina, and our ability to accelerate quickly. If we don't eat correctly, we can become weak and our overall health can decline, because we are not getting enough nutrients.
- 3 A healthy diet improves our general level of health, and can help us recover more quickly from injuries.
- 4 Along with a program of fitness training, our diet can help us develop stamina and improve athletic performance.
- 5 Diet is essential for our growth, and development.

What to eat and when to eat it

The timing of the meals you eat is important. On the day of a match the intake of fat and protein should be restricted, as these nutrients require a relatively long time to digest. Plan to have your pre-match meal at least 3 hours before the match. Your pre-match meal should be: high in carbohydrate (this is the fuel that your body needs to perform at the highest level) low in fat, low in protein, not too bulky, and easy to digest. You should eat foods such as: breakfast cereal with low fat milk, toast or bread with jam/honey, sandwiches with banana/honey/jam, pasta/rice, energy bars, and orange juice.

Calorie intake according to UK Dept of health for Women is approx 1940 calories per day, for men it is around 2550, the figures below apply to adults with low activity levels

Age	Calories per day	
	Boys	Girls
1-3	1,230	1,165
4-6	1,715	1,545
7-10	1,970	1,740
11-14	2,220	1,845
15-18	2,755	2,110
Adults	2,550	1,940

A snack high in carbohydrate may be eaten about 2 hours before a match; however, the time reference is only a guideline as there are great individual differences in the ability to digest food.

It is a good idea for you to experiment with a variation of foods at different times before training sessions. Food such as toast, bread or crumpets with jam/honey, sweetened cereal and low fat milk, orange juice and fruits such as bananas/grapes could be eaten.

During the cool down you should drink sports drinks and small snacks, such as bananas/grapes, Jaffa cakes/Jammy dodgers. (see last page for US equivalent)

Once the game is over, fluids should be replaced and carbohydrates should be eaten as soon as possible, around 50grams of carbs should be eaten within approx 2 hour's after the game, which helps to promote recovery of glycogen stores, and you should aim to eat a meal, which is high in carbohydrates, such as pasta, spaghetti, rice, (curry with rice as long as the fat content is low) noodles, low fat pasta sauce, bread, potatoes and baked beans, beans on toast!

Carbohydrate rich foods must be the main source of calories in your diet. Table 1 lists foods, which contain a lot of carbohydrate. You should aim to eat the main bulk of your diet from complex carbs. Simple carbs should not be consumed in large quantities and are more useful as snacks between workouts, or to top up your energy intake. The carbs you eat should be balanced with a healthy intake of protein, low fat and plenty of fruit and vegetables, which are an excellent source of carbs.

Table 1 Carbohydrate-rich food:

<u>Complex carbs</u>	<u>Simple carbs</u>	<u>Mixture of complex and simple carbs</u>
Bread	Sugar	Cakes
Pasta	Jam	Biscuits
Rice	Honey	Puddings
Noodles	Yoghurt	Sweet pastries
Oats	Fromage Frais	Cheesecake
Breakfast cereals	Ice cream	Breakfast cereals (sweetened)
Pulses (peas, beans, lentils)	Jelly	Bananas
Baked beans	Raisins	Grapes
Apricots, peaches	Full sugar cordials	Oranges
Potatoes	Jelly sweets	Mangos
Parsnips, sweet corn	Soft drinks (Lucozade, sprite, energy drinks)	

If you do not eat enough carbs (kcal/energy) then you will not have the energy to complete the match (or training) and subsequently your performance will suffer, and more importantly you will be more susceptible to injury.

Fluids

We have done good food, and we have looked at what snacks can boost the body during and after a match or training session. Now let's look at what you should drink.

The water lost from the body during sweating needs to be replaced to stop you getting tired quickly, and also speed up the recovery process – that means feeling fitter and sharper afterwards a lot sooner.

These checks will help players:

- Weight – 1kg of weight loss during training is equal to 1 litre of fluid lost. As well as the normal 6-8 glasses of water per day, the water lost through sweating must be replaced.
- The “pee test” – If your urine is dark coloured, it means you need to have a drink. Lots of trips to the toilet, producing clear coloured urine, shows you have taken on enough fluid.
- Thirst – Being thirsty is an unreliable indicator of when you need to have a drink. If you're thirsty, you're actually already partly dehydrated, so if you finish training session and your gasping it's a good give away you have not taken on enough fluids.

What's best to drink?

For soccer players, the best fluid to drink is a diluted carbohydrate/electrolyte solution. In plain English, that's the kind of drinks like Isostar, Lucozade Sport and Gatorade.

I personally make my own sports drink: 1 Litre of diluted squash, lemon or orange, or half fruit juice and half water with a pinch of salt. Basically that is a good enough sports drink and costs pennies!

How much should I drink?

Only a little – but often. If you drink too much too quickly all that will happen is you will get stomachache.

Don't drink fizzy sports drinks just before a game either; they are OK after a match

For a typical day of the match starting at 3pm:

Breakfast:

Cereal with semi-skimmed milk, or full fat for kids.

Toast with low fat spread, jam or marmalade and any other bread.

Fruit or yoghurts.

Fry-ups: bacon/sausage grilled or cold meats.

Eggs scrambled-boiled or poached.

Baked beans

Fluid: water – fruit juice – glass of milk, unfortunately tea & coffee are diuretics!

Snacks: fruit – cereal bars in between breakfast/lunch.

Chocolate – mars bars – snickers are OK but in moderation!

NO CRISPS, they are just sticks of fat!

Light lunch:

From 11.30am

Pasta – rice – chicken grilled

Salads with tuna

Jacket potatoes with baked beans and or tuna, and steamed veg.

Fluid intake for the day should be at least 2-2 ½ litres of water, sipping all day.

For kids, they need at least 1-1 ½ litres of water before lunch.

For halftime try some Jaffa cakes or bananas or grapes for a quick boost. Mangos are now taking over the Orange as a high carb halftime snack; one Mango contains about 42 grams of carbs compared to the Orange that has about 15 grams!

And don't forget full time treats, now the match is over, the players can get a treat as a reward for competing/winning a game, but only after the game! Gone are the days of sandwiches and a cup of tea at half time, even for the grass roots players, food and nutrition is a big part of the soccer player's life.

Eat & play well, and also, have fun!

Parents, be a guide for life's big game

Children who participate in sports programs have the opportunity to maximize their potential physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, but it doesn't just happen.

Although good coaching and league administration are important, nothing can replace knowledgeable, interested and supportive parents.

So how can moms and dads help their children make the most of their athletic endeavors?

First, know the rules of the game.

The more parents know about the sport their child is playing, the more calm and at ease they will be, parents may not be aware of the updated rules of their child's sport, and may sit on the sidelines wondering why a call was, or was not made?

Parents should also be aware of the developmental milestones for the activity so they can ascertain if their child is physically & mentally ready to take on that sport.

Helping children set goals

Another dimension of sports parenting: helping your children to set goals.

The more goals your children set and reach for themselves, the more successful they will be and the more fun they will have, but, those goals need to be realistic.

The coach may be a good source for providing drill pointers, but collaborating with parents has even more benefits.

For the parents, knowing their child's coach, that their coach is not too tough, is organized & structured and are being coached in a safe environment, plus, are always giving positive re-enforcement.

One of the best ways to keep in touch with your child's coach, is to volunteer, ask if they need an assistant coach or administrator, offer to spear-head a fund raising event or sign up to bring snacks for the kids after the game has finished.

Another great way to get involved is to be the team's journalist! Bring your camera and start taking pictures of the kids at practices and games, (with permission) then create an online website such as: <http://www.soccercoach1966.com> for a team photo album, this can encourage communication between team members, their families and coaches.

Communication is another key to good sports parenting, especially when it comes to talking with your child about life lessons such as winning well, dealing with defeat, cooperation, perseverance and the like.

Talking about cooperation and how players have to work together to protect the goal and how it's important to pass the ball to other players, particularly if they are nearer the goal! Also talk about being patient with everyone, because we all make mistakes, players, parents and coaches!

One of the biggest lessons is perseverance, sometimes you have to remind players that skills are not going to come easy, and that practice is very important.

One of the most important things is to listen to the player's frustrations & excitements, sometimes they don't want you to solve their problem, they just want you to listen, but talk must also be accompanied by action/demonstration.

Parents should be good role models, when in the stands supporting their child, be positive on your teams achievements and also on the opponents if they have made a good play. Being your child's cheerleader is the biggest role as a sports parent; try to make it to as many games and practices as possible, offer encouragement and support and look for ways to let them know, you are their biggest fan.

Developmental milestones for children in sports.

Preschool:

Many children at this age are beginning to get involved in organized sports. To see if your child is ready. Assess his basic skills such as running, throwing and tracking objects in motion. Also consider his attention span. Is he focused enough to learn from group instruction?

Most children aren't ready to participate in organized sports until they are about 4-5 years old, even then, practices should be short and allow time for free play. Programs should focus on the fundamentals of skill development and emphasize fun over competition.

Early Elementary:

By now, many children have had at least one experience with an organized sport. The emphasis should continue to be on skill development and having fun, not on competition. This is a good time to analyze what you want your child to get out of athletic participation. Ask the child and they will more than likely want to have fun, be with their friends and learn new skills. Make sure this philosophy lines up with your child's coach and league instructions. Let them sample different sports activities until they find "Their" sport that they truly enjoy.

Late Elementary:

At this age, children are beginning to get a grip on coordination and have a better concept of team effort. This is also a time when relative age factor comes into play and those that mature physically and mentally may seem to have an advantage. If not handled properly, it may put extra pressure on the mature child to perform, which could lead to burnout.

Children who mature later may have to work harder on skill development and may not initially get their coach's attention, but given time and encouragement they often catch up with their counterparts. Because children mature at different rates, it is important to continue to emphasize the process not the results, and to praise effort instead of outcome. This is especially important as competition elevates. Look for programs that adhere to this philosophy and make sure that the entire team has an opportunity to participate in play, regardless of skill level.

Middle School:

This is a time when children are mastering skills and techniques. This can also be a time when league politics, controlling parents and abusive coaches may dominate an activity, though it can happen earlier, if the child feels like they have lost control over their activity, or is being pressured by others, they may be in danger of burnout, (or turn to another sport!)

Kids at this age are better able to understand and handle the pressure of competition, but performance and self-esteem issues are closely linked now and can effect how youth feel about themselves in other facets of life. They also may need encouragement and information to deal with the awkwardness of changing bodies and minds.

Soccer Tournaments

As a soccer coach, I don't have to tell you that coaching a youth soccer team while travelling in tournaments is a difficult task. One of the hardest responsibilities as a soccer coach while on the road is monitoring your players' food intake. As their soccer coach, it is important for you as their coach to give the players a list of foods that will help their bodies recover quickly and give them the most energy for the following games.

First of all, some of the tournaments I have coached in often play games with only a brief time between games. This is often not enough time to leave the complex to eat. In this situation, instruct your players to bring energy snacks that are easy and are an excellent energy source. These snacks are easy to carry and won't spoil.

SOCCKER SNACK FOODS

- Apples, Bananas, Dried Banana, Chips, Apricots, Raisins, Fig Newton's
- Graham Crackers, bagels, English muffins, Blueberry muffins, Oatmeal-raisin cookies, granola bars, hard pretzels, bread sticks, popcorn, cold cereal
- Corn Flakes, juice in a box, raw vegetables, fruit snack, fruit sauce

Here is a list of foods that are high in carbohydrates:

FRUITS:

- Apples, Bananas, Peaches, Apricots, Raisins, Oranges, Grapefruit, Kiwi
- Pineapple, Plums, Dates

BREADS/CEREALS

- Bagels, English Muffins, Granola Bars , Rice, Blueberry Muffins, Toast
- French toast, Dry Cereal, Pancakes, Waffles, Oatmeal, Pasta

VEGETABLES

- Corn, Broccoli, Potatoes, Carrots, Peas, Beans, Cabbage, Yams
- Cauliflower, Turnips, Green Peppers

DAIRY FOODS

- Milk, Yogurt

Soccer coaches, make sure your team has this list next time they travel on an out of town tournament.

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