CHEERLEADING
NUTRITION FACTS



Cheerleading ranks among the country's most dynamic, demanding, physical and technical activities. Giving your body the right nutrients is essential. Good nutrition brings more energy for intense team practices, greater muscle mass for strong, steady stunts and powerful tumbling, and quicker recovery so you can do it all again the next day! An effective performance nutrition plan combines several essentials: nourishing meals with quality carbohydrates, protein and fats; sound hydration habits; energizing snacks in the middle of the morning and afternoon; and, above all, recovery nutrition after workouts and practice. Follow these habits consistently to give yourself the best chance of achieving your fitness and performance goals.

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ENERGY NEEDS



As you explore each macronutrient, picture a double-base stunt. Most use three positions: 2 bases, 1 back-spot and 1 flyer. Each position has a distinct, vital part in supporting the stunt sequence. In the same way, each macronutrient has its own role in the body. Although their jobs differ, these nutrients work together to meet all of the body's metabolic needs.

Macronutrient Guide

Macronutrients and Stunt Roles Compared	Macronutrient	Stunt Role
Carbohydrates = 2 Bases	**Carbohydrates** • Form the largest share of the diet • The body's main fuel, supporting stamina and endurance	**Bases** • 2 of the stunt's 4 people serve as bases • Need great strength and stamina to lift and move through the stunt sequence
Protein = Back-spot	**Protein** • Essential for building, maintaining and repairing body tissues • Supports muscle strength	**Back-spot** • Supplies much of the stunt's stability • Needs great strength to guard the flyer's head and shoulders and help prevent injury
Fat = Flyer	**Fat** • An energy-dense nutrient: small amounts provide more calories/energy than carbs or protein • Shields organs and helps maintain body temperature • Heart-healthy fats are vital for immunity and brain health	**Flyer** • Usually the smallest member of the stunt team • Even at a small size, needs as much energy, stamina and skill as those in the other positions • Needs a healthy body fat % for protection in this role, which involves hard landings from tosses and cradles

HYDRATION PLAN

Hydration takes ongoing attention. Start drinking fluids when you wake up and keep drinking through the day. This helps you arrive at practice or an event fully hydrated. If cheerleaders wait for thirst before drinking, they may already be close to dehydration.



1. Hydrate Before

- Coaches/captains should set up drink stations at practice or require team members to bring their own water bottles.
- Include foods and drinks rich in electrolytes in daily meals. This is the best way to support optimal hydration:
  - Water
  - Electrolyte drinks, such as Gatorade™ or PowerAde™
  - Coconut water
  - Milk
  - Yogurt
  - Bananas
  - Pretzels
  - Popcorn, lightly salted
  - Canned soup
  - Saltine crackers
  - Deli meat, e.g., turkey or ham
  - Trail mix with lightly salted nuts, dried fruit, granola, etc.
  - Beef jerky
  - If cramps are common, add salt, soy sauce or other sodium-rich seasonings to meals
- Check hydration by observing urine color
  - A lemonade-like urine color indicates hydration. An apple-juice color signals dehydration: the cheerleader needs to drink more fluids.

2. Hydrate During

- Water is enough for practice or events of one hour or less.
- An electrolyte drink may help during sessions over one hour and/or when cheering in hot, humid conditions.

3. Rehydrate After

- Rehydration helps cheerleaders recover after practice or a workout, get ready for the next session, and lower the risks linked with dehydration.
- Aim to completely replace any lost fluid and electrolytes.
- If practice or an event caused weight loss, drink 16-24 ounces of fluid for every pound lost.

BODY COMPOSITION



Cheerleaders can adjust weight, lean mass and/or body fat in healthy ways that improve performance when a trusted professional, such as a registered dietitian, sets suitable goals.

Cheerleading demands intense physical and mental effort. Its strong focus on appearance can also encourage a drive for thinness, usually among females, or a fixation on muscularity, usually among males. As a result, cheerleaders of any age, gender or ethnicity often develop a distorted body image and may develop disordered eating habits or an eating disorder. Coaches and parents should recognize that cheerleaders are among the athletes at greatest risk for eating disorders. Education and prevention help protect their health and keep them aware of the dangers these disorders pose.

TRYOUTS



Preparing for tryouts usually means hard training and preparation, along with some nerves. This period demands considerable activity and energy, so cheerleaders need adequate fuel to maintain strength and energy levels. During tryout preparation, eat three nourishing meals, plus midday snacks and recovery snacks after training. Good hydration keeps the body cool and helps prevent dehydration and its symptoms. Adequate meals and snacks matter just as much on tryout day(s). If your appetite drops that day, consider a liquid meal replacement or mild solid foods that digest easily. Options include a fruit and yogurt smoothie, toast with peanut butter, a turkey wrap, a granola bar or trail mix.

SAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR TRYOUT TRAINING:

Meal	Ideas
Breakfast	Whole wheat bagel sandwich: eggs, cheese and turkey sausage + fresh fruit salad + milk and water
Midmorning snack	Almonds over low-fat Greek yogurt + water
Lunch	Turkey on whole wheat bread + Wheat Thins and baby carrots with hummus + water
Before-training snack	Peanut butter over a banana + water
Post-training recovery snack	Low-fat chocolate milk + ½ PBJ sandwich + water
Dinner	Vegetable-rich side salad + grilled shrimp or chicken + stir-fried vegetables over brown rice

SAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR TRYOUT DAY:

Meal	Ideas
Breakfast	Oatmeal + whole wheat toast with peanut butter and banana slices + milk and water
Snack at a tryout break	Dried-fruit, nut and pretzel trail mix + water/sports drink
Lunch	Grilled chicken wrap + baked chips + fruit cup + water
Snack at a tryout break	String cheese + whole grain crackers + water/sports drink
Dinner	Vegetable-rich side salad + whole grain spaghetti with lean beef meat sauce + green beans + dinner roll + preferred dessert

PRACTICE

Whether preparing for a competition, a sports game or a pep rally, keep fueling to maintain peak strength and energy. Plan around practice times: eat three nourishing meals, midday snacks and recovery snacks after training, and stay properly hydrated.

MEAL AND SNACK IDEAS BEFORE PRACTICE:

Snacks Before Workouts (30-60 minutes before)

- Rice cake with 1-2 tablespoons peanut butter plus banana or another fruit you enjoy
- Parfait with Greek yogurt, fruit and granola
- Mix 1/4 cup mixed nuts with dried cranberries and dark chocolate chips!
- Half an English muffin with 1-2 tablespoons almond or peanut butter and 1 tablespoon jelly/jam
- Rice cake with 1-2 tablespoons hummus and a couple of deli turkey slices
- Granola bar
- Cheese over whole wheat crackers
- Whole wheat toast with ½ mashed avocado and a hard-boiled egg

Meals Before Workouts (1-2 hours before)

- ½ cup oatmeal topped with walnuts, berries and cinnamon
- 2 whole wheat waffles with 1-2 tablespoons peanut butter and banana
- Chicken in a whole wheat wrap with vegetables and mustard
- ½ cup brown rice with lean meat and vegetables
- Whole grain cereal bowl with low-fat milk and fruit
- Cream cheese on a whole wheat bagel, with fresh fruit
- Whole wheat pasta with shrimp and vegetables, sautéed
- Sandwich of grilled chicken, turkey or roast beef on whole wheat bread with plenty of vegetables
- Tuna salad on a thin whole wheat bagel with tomatoes and spinach

SNACK IDEAS DURING PRACTICE:

Snacks During Workouts (Quick, Easy-to-Digest Foods)

- Banana
- Dried fruit
- Grapes
- Sliced orange
- Granola bar
- Energy gel or gummies
- Squeezable applesauce



RECOVERY MEAL/SNACK IDEAS AFTER PRACTICE:

Meal/Snack After Workouts (30-60 minutes afterward)

- Smoothie of frozen fruit blended with Greek yogurt and either low-fat milk or almond milk
- Vegetable omelet + a slice of wheat toast
- Low-fat chocolate milk, 8-12 ounces
- Protein pancake: combine 4 egg whites, ½ cup rolled oats, ½ cup low-fat cottage cheese, 1/8 teaspoon baking powder and ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract. Heat a griddle to medium-low, then cook until bubbles form. Flip and cook for 30-60 seconds more. Add fresh berries or banana slices.
- Green smoothie: blend 4 cups spinach, ½ cup vanilla bean yogurt, 1 cup almond milk, 1 banana and 1 tablespoon peanut butter with ice
- Greek yogurt with granola and/or nuts
- PBJ sandwich
- Chicken stir-fry: sauté chicken with fresh vegetables and serve over brown rice
- Whole wheat pita with 2 tablespoons hummus, sliced turkey and spinach
- Baked salmon fillet, ½ cup brown rice and a spinach salad

GAMES

Use the same fueling, hydration and recovery habits for games as for practice. Halftime offers a chance for a quick snack to lift your energy for the second half. Bring nutritious snacks that help replenish your energy.

Snacks for Halftime:

- Granola bars
- ½ PBJ sandwiches
- Bananas
- Grapes
- Oranges
- Finger sandwiches
- Fig Newtons



COMPETITION

Months of choreography, skill work, conditioning and refining each move usually lead to about 2 minutes and 30 seconds on the mat. You want to step onto the floor fully confident that you have done everything you can, including fueling well and consistently. Planning ahead and packing snacks is the best way to ensure familiar, nourishing, energy-rich foods and avoid stomach discomfort, sickness or fatigue from processed concession foods.

Competition Snack Ideas:

- Granola bars
- PBJ sandwiches
- Turkey wraps
- Pretzels
- Fresh fruit
- Yogurt
- Trail mix
- Crackers with hummus
- Bottled water and electrolyte sports drinks



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