LACROSSE SPORTS NUTRITION



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> Lately, I've been getting cramps near the end of games. This semester is much busier, and fitting in breakfast is hard. Lunch is a peanut butter sandwich, and I think I get enough fluid - a glass of water at each meal. Would adding a sports drink be enough, or what would help me avoid cramping again?

Often described as "the fastest sport on two legs," lacrosse moves between low and very high intensities and draws on all major energy systems. Success calls for strength, speed, agility and endurance, together with mental toughness, fast reactions, fine motor skills and sharp concentration.

Keeping up with lacrosse requires consistent fueling. With little free time, many players miss meals and fail to hydrate fully, causing fatigue, heavy legs and cramps. Planning food and fluids keeps your body strong and supports good recovery through every phase of training.

Information provided by

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a dietetic practice group of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
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FUELING VICTORY

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Focusing on food only on game day and the day before won't keep you optimally fueled. Make sound fueling a priority 90 percent of the time each week.

PRESEASON: PLAN AHEAD

Spring semester gets busy fast. Starting nutrition goals in the offseason lets you use the preseason to adjust to a new schedule and build on last year's good habits. Waiting until preseason to tackle weight loss or muscle building will hurt your performance.

Use the few days before classes to review your schedule and set aside time to eat. Athletes often overlook lunch plans and miss breakfast while rushing to early classes. This leaves them tired and slow at afternoon practice and often leads to cramps. Energy bars can help in a pinch, but plan ways to include whole foods each day.

Make your breakfast sandwich the night before, or set out food ready to grab on your way out. Consider where you will be at lunchtime and whether packing lunch or visiting a dining hall works best. Depending on your size, an energy bar and peanut butter sandwich fall well short of the fuel you need for a day.

Build a Balanced Meal

(At most meals, select at least one serving from every group)

- **Whole-grain carbs** - Whole-grain bread/cereal, oatmeal, brown rice, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta, baked/sweet potatoes
- **Lean protein** - Eggs, low-fat milk/soy milk, low-fat cheese, Greek yogurt, tuna/salmon, chicken breast, beans, pork
- **Produce** (two or three servings) - Salad, cooked/raw vegetables, berries, pineapple, whole fruit, apple sauce, 100 percent juice
- **Healthy fats** - Olive oil, oil-based dressing, avocado, hummus, nuts/seeds, peanut butter

Snacks are also important for meeting total calorie needs. Skipping them often leaves a shortfall you cannot make up at meals, hurting performance. Choose portable foods that need no refrigeration. Better yet, spend a few dollars on an insulated lunch bag so you can bring what you need. Many lacrosse athletes have trouble getting enough fruits and vegetables as snacks. Too little produce can leave you short on carbohydrates and energy.

Simple Shelf-Stable Snacks

(Pick two or more if you have trouble maintaining weight)

After exercise, or three to four hours before it:

- MSG-free beef/turkey jerky
- Shelf-stable chocolate milk or protein shakes
- Tuna pouches
- Protein powder
- Single-serving shelf-stable hummus
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- Single servings of nuts/trail mix/peanut butter
- Edamame, dry-roasted

After exercise, or one to two hours before it:

- Apples, bananas or oranges
- Tubes of apple sauce
- Fruit cups (in their own juice or light syrup)
- Energy bars
- Low-fat popcorn
- Crackers
- Fruit, dried or freeze-dried



COMPETITION

Some weeks have multiple games, leaving little time to rest,



recover, or make up for missed meals and forgotten fluids after practice. Team travel can also make meeting your energy needs difficult.

Eating well only on game day and the day before is not enough to keep you optimally fueled. Prioritize good fueling and carbohydrate intake 90 percent of the time during the week. Without enough carbs, exercise may rely mainly on fat, making high-intensity work harder and less efficient.

Female athletes who limit energy intake also face a higher risk of low calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc levels. If your menstrual cycle is irregular or your family has a history of low iron, these minerals may be especially important to bone health and performance. Discuss this with your sports-registered dietitian (RD).

Fueling on Game Day

- Avoid trying anything new on game day.
  - ♦ Test unfamiliar foods during practice.
- Schedule a pregame meal three to four hours before play begins.
- **Pregame Meal:** Have carbs, lean protein and fluids.
  - ♦ Keep fat and fiber in check as game time approaches.
- **Pregame Snack:** Have more fluids and a carb-based snack 30 to 60 minutes before the game. Options include small bars, sports drink, pretzels, animal crackers, apple sauce, fruit, and energy gel/chews.
- **Breaks:** Take a few gulps of water or sports drink in these brief pauses.
- **Halftime:** Eat carbs similar to your pregame snack so you stay fueled through the end of the game - especially if it runs into overtime!

The season runs from winter through late spring, so prepare to fuel in every kind of weather.

Many student-athletes underestimate hydration in winter, yet sweat losses continue during practices and workouts. Your lungs also work harder to control internal body temperature, increasing fluid needs. In cold weather, drink room-temperature water and warm beverages such as tea or cider. Include foods rich in fluids and salt to support hydration: fruits, soups, vegetables, soy sauce, ketchup/mustard, pasta sauce, pickles and crackers. Warmer months bring higher temperatures and humidity, which also make temperature control harder.

Consistent hydration in winter and spring helps sustain energy. Alcohol can be dehydrating, so it is best avoided 72 hours before or after games or intense practices.

Recovering

- Aim to have a recovery snack or drink within the first hour after workouts/games, then a balanced meal within two hours after that snack.
- To rehydrate, fluids and electrolytes (especially sodium) are vital.
- For muscle repair, choose a good source of protein.

On the road, team meals and snacks may not meet every need. Stick with familiar foods your body knows. Ask a coach in advance what will be served. Identify any gaps, then pack snacks to complement team meals or find a store within walking distance of your hotel. Planning ahead avoids fueling surprises and problems.

CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

As postseason play starts near semester's end, following the plan you used all season helps you stay strong and healthy through the finish. Progress toward the NCAA championship often brings games and travel while final exams and projects consume much of your time and energy.

Schedule meals and snacks alongside studying, papers and projects. If long hours in the library lie ahead, work out how to get the food and fluids that keep you fueled for postseason play. Start each day with a plan so you do not overlook what you normally consume during the regular season.

LEARN YOUR HYDRATION NEEDS

- Hydration builds over time; make it a daily priority.
- Maximize fluids during the 24 hours before a game.
- Minimum fluid intake should equal half your body weight in ounces (for example, 150 lbs. = at least 75 oz. of fluid).
- Weigh yourself before and after practice a few times to gauge how much fluid you lose through sweat.
- For each pound lost during exercise, replace 20-24 ounces of fluid and one gram of salt.
- Add this amount to your minimum daily fluid requirement.
- Example: A 150-pound athlete loses four pounds in a workout:



Daily fluid minimum = 75 oz.

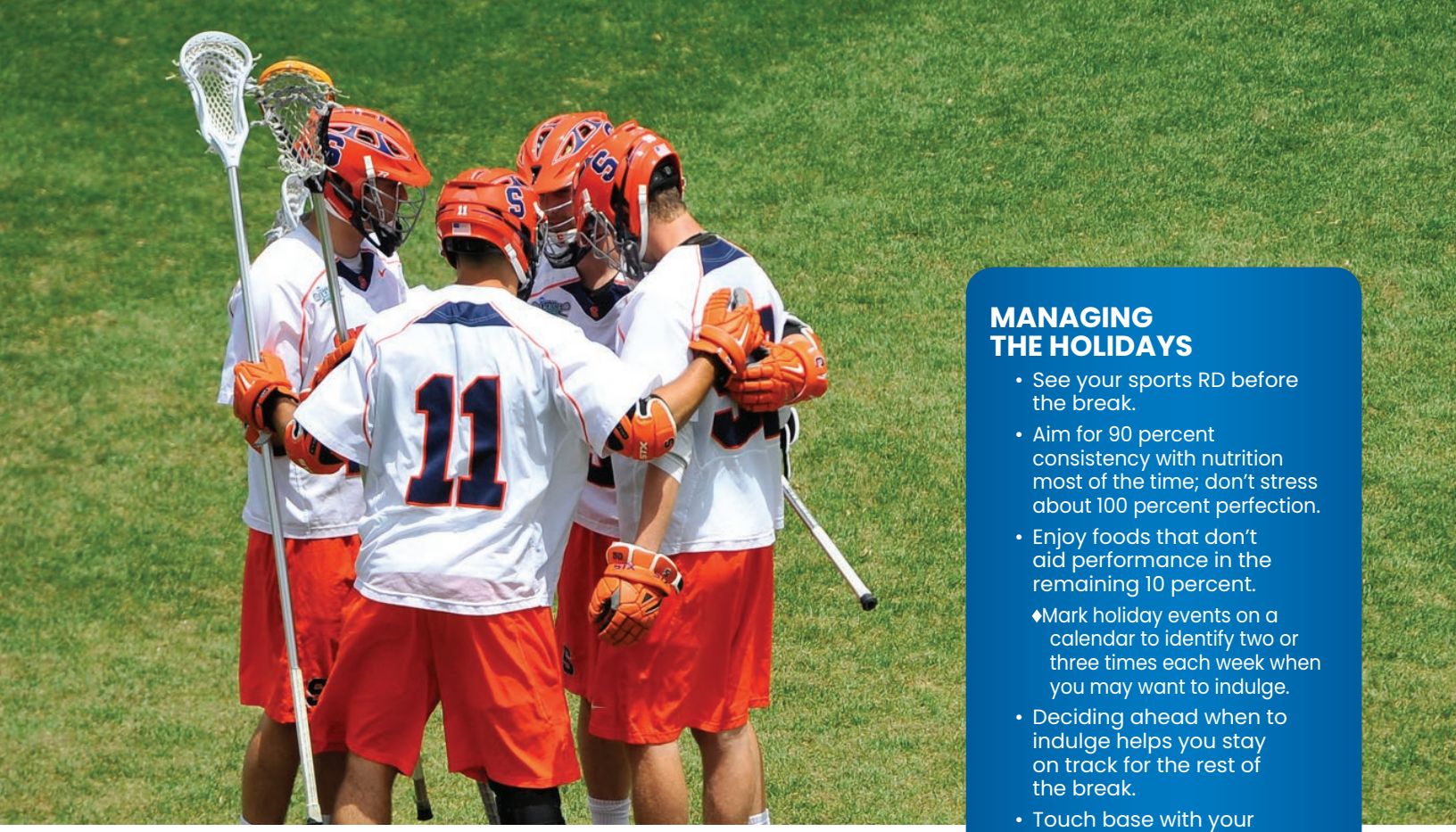


Fluids to replace sweat losses = 80-96 oz.



Total fluids needed = 155-171 oz. per day (plus fluids you already drink during workouts)





OFFSEASON

Summer. Use summer to consider your goals for next season. Attending coaching camp calls for extra planning to stay fueled and strong and help prevent overuse injuries. Make this a time for active recovery, strength building and new goals for the year ahead. Prioritize the nutrition challenges you faced last spring. Summer also offers a chance to discover foods and recipes that keep your eating interesting throughout the year.

Fall ball. During the six weeks of "Fall Ball," work on building substantial lean mass and practice the fueling habits you will use when the regular season begins in spring. Aim for lean protein at every meal to support muscle growth.

Winter. The holiday break is part of the offseason and takes extra effort to stay focused on your goals. Finals stress and busy holiday calendars can easily distract you. Meet with your sports RD before the break to review your activity and changing nutrition needs. This can add motivation to follow your plan through the holidays.

MANAGING THE HOLIDAYS

- See your sports RD before the break.
- Aim for 90 percent consistency with nutrition most of the time; don't stress about 100 percent perfection.
- Enjoy foods that don't aid performance in the remaining 10 percent.
  - ♦Mark holiday events on a calendar to identify two or three times each week when you may want to indulge.
- Deciding ahead when to indulge helps you stay on track for the rest of the break.
- Touch base with your sports RD once or twice over the break.
- On party days, avoid starving yourself.
  - ♦Eat and hydrate well so you feel in control when you arrive.
  - ♦A hungry brain has a much harder time making good decisions!
- Keep to the basics: eat every three to four hours, choose lean protein, hydrate, and have enough produce to feel full.

SIMPLE PROTEIN CHOICES

- Tuna pouches
- Chicken breasts, pre-cooked
- Prepared hard-boiled eggs
- Whey protein bars
- Cottage cheese, low-fat
- Deli turkey, ham or roast beef
- String cheese
- Jerky
- Shelf-stable chocolate milk/protein shakes
- Greek yogurt
- Protein powder
- Milk/soy milk
- Beans



Written by SCAN/CPSDA registered dietitians (RDs). For advice on customizing an eating plan to meet your nutrition goals, consult an RD who specializes in sports, particularly a board-certified specialist in sports dietetics (CSSD). Find a qualified RD at www.scandpg.org or www.sportsRD.org.