NUTRITION FOR THE FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETE



KENT GIDLEY / ALABAMA; ADDITIONAL PHOTOS FROM NCAA PHOTOS ARCHIVE AND SHUTTERSTOCK

> "I've been told successful linemen need to weigh at least 320 pounds. I eat large meals and drink a couple of protein shakes daily. My weight is rising, but I'm unsure how much is muscle. What can I eat to grow bigger and stronger without feeling so stuffed that I need to lie down after a meal?"

Football is widely described as the ultimate team sport: each player must fulfill his role for a play to work. Long games consist of short, fast bursts that call for speed, stamina and mental resilience, especially in the closing stages. Every football athlete needs speed, power, strength and agility. Body composition is closely tied to position, with larger, heavier athletes on the line and smaller, leaner athletes in skill roles.

As a college football athlete, concentrate on more than a target scale weight. Build an appetite for a hearty breakfast, then make room for meals and snacks throughout the day. Always include protein and balance it with carbohydrates, including fruit and vegetables, and fats from foods such as nuts and seeds. Muscle gain depends less on larger portions than on meal timing, food combinations and nutrient density.

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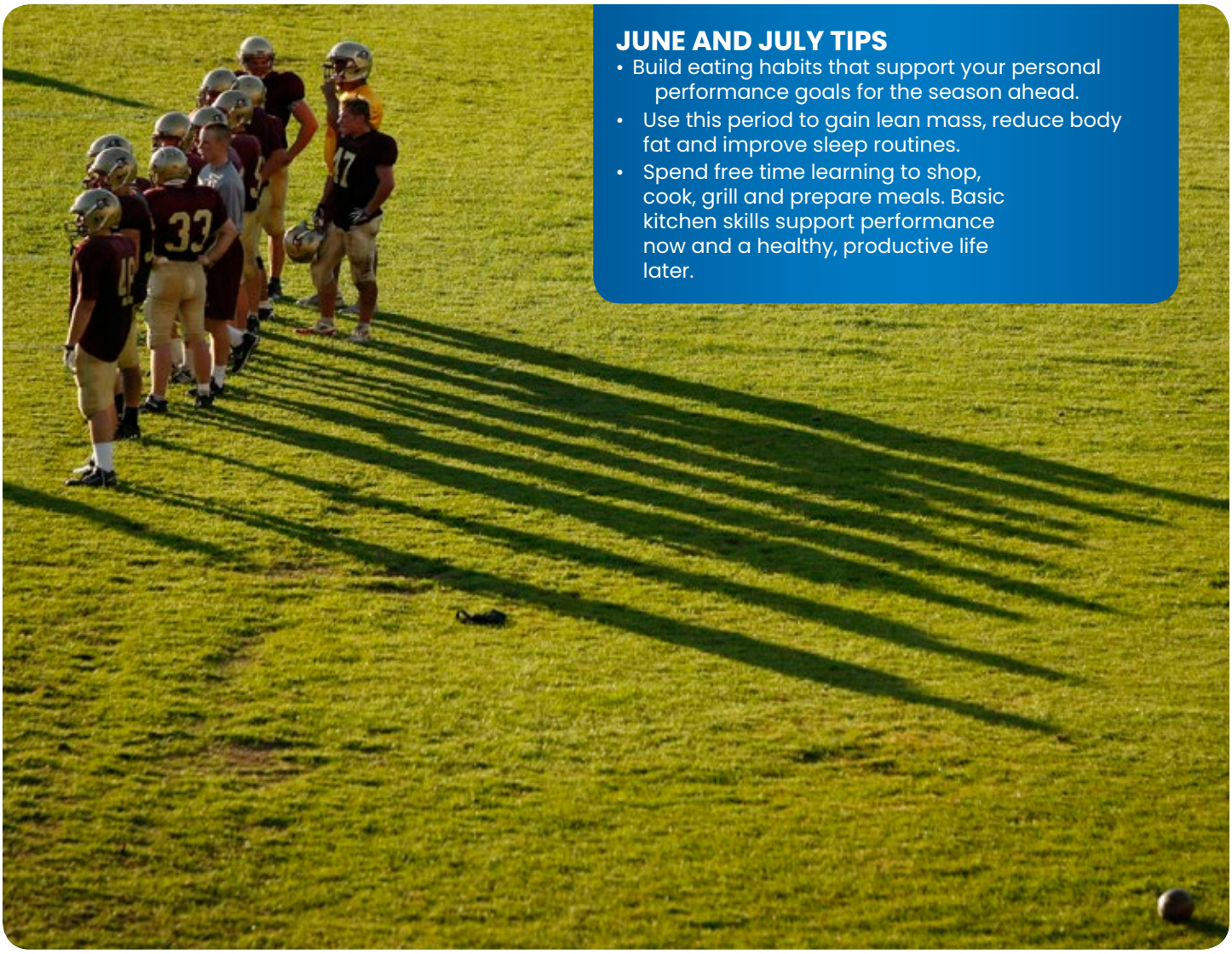
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JUNE AND JULY TIPS

- Build eating habits that support your personal performance goals for the season ahead.
- Use this period to gain lean mass, reduce body fat and improve sleep routines.
- Spend free time learning to shop, cook, grill and prepare meals. Basic kitchen skills support performance now and a healthy, productive life later.

PRESEASON

June and July:
Eight-Week Summer Program

Summer conditioning gets you ready for preseason camp and competition. Strength work helps improve body composition after the May break, while outdoor runs prepare you for late-August heat. Adjusting to heat and learning to perform in it are priorities. Campus life is quieter in summer, and dining services may offer fewer meals than during regular semesters.

August

Whether called fall camp or preseason, these weeks bring demanding preparation for every football athlete. Meals and snacks fit around practice, and fluids should always be accessible. Key priorities include:

Get enough fluids.

Pre- and post-practice weigh-ins show how much fluid you lose through sweat. Replace each pound lost with 20 to 24 ounces of fluid and one gram of sodium. Meeting fluid and sodium, or salt, needs helps keep you playing. Sports drinks, water-rich foods such as fruit, vegetables and soups, and salty foods can help. Options include pretzels, crackers, salted nuts, beef jerky, lunch meats, cheese, marinara sauce, mustard and pickles. Adding salt at meals may help prevent muscle cramps for some athletes.

Maintain lean mass.

Meeting energy, protein and nutrient needs helps preserve lean mass during camp, whether you need to maintain or manage weight. Use the daily schedule to support your goals and eat at every offered meal. Treat preseason camp as a chance to



develop an appetite early in the day and at regular intervals, then carry that eating pattern into the season.

Trouble maintaining weight or building muscle? Begin with a balanced meal whenever you can. Add a protein shake alongside, or instead of, your usual water or sports drink. Choose nutritious, calorie-rich foods that deliver plenty of energy in a small portion. For example:

- Add energy-dense trail mix, guacamole, cheese, nut butters, granola, nuts, 2 percent milk and chocolate milk to meals.
- Spread peanut butter on toast, granola bars or waffles, or blend it into shakes.
- Put cheese and mayonnaise on sandwiches, snack on nuts and trail mix, and sip shakes when your schedule allows.
- If heat reduces your appetite, try cool foods: yogurt parfaits, pudding with fruit, tuna salad, deviled eggs, cheese and crackers, lunch-meat or pimento-cheese sandwiches, fruit with peanut butter, or smoothies.

Starting with cool foods may help you progress to a hot meal built around protein.

Concerned about weight control? Quality meals and snacks help you manage weight while preserving muscle and strength during camp. Lean proteins and nutritious, high-fiber sides support fullness and satisfaction. Try these ideas:

- Build breakfast, lunch and dinner around protein, with plenty of colorful produce.
- Choose baked, grilled or roasted chicken, turkey or fish, or tenderloin and sirloin cuts of beef and pork.
- High-fiber carbs, including 100 percent whole-wheat bread, brown rice, whole-grain pasta, quinoa and beans, make meals more filling.
- Snack on tuna salad, apples with almond or peanut butter, carrots or pretzels with hummus, boiled eggs, cottage cheese with fruit, Greek yogurt, or dried and fresh fruit such as cherries and plums.
- Experienced athletes may cut back on snacks or choose only fruit, fluids or protein shakes between meals. This can work if earlier meals are sufficient and balanced, with protein, quality carbohydrates and abundant produce.



RECOVERY NUTRITION THAT WORKS

- Keep prioritizing nutrition for recovery throughout the season.
- Vary your recovery snacks so they stay appealing.
- "Food fatigue" may appear around week 6 or 7. Ask your sports dietitian or training-table manager to refresh menus, add live-cooking choices and theme nights, and include players' menu requests in the season's second half. Variety helps the team stay interested in fueling for a strong finish.

IN SEASON

Late August to December

The fall semester brings a steadier routine, and everyday demands may seem easier after camp. Practice and conditioning still require energy, but training-table and pregame meals help meet those demands. Recovery food after practice and conditioning supports game performance and immune function. Even with more team meals, keep prioritizing recovery foods within 30 to 60 minutes of practice. Choices include fruit, protein shakes, bagels with spreads, energy bars and sports drinks.

Consistent recovery supports late-season performance, keeps you on the field, helps you recover from injury, and maintains weight and body composition.

POSTSEASON

Late December and January: Championship and Bowl Preparation

Your team has earned a postseason game; ideally, finals finish before preparation starts. Focus on recovering from the season so you enter championship practices refreshed and ready for the final game. Meal plans may stop when the semester ends. Meals and snacks must then supply practice and conditioning energy while supporting the right weight and body composition for your last performance. Remember:

- Catch up on rest.
- Keep recovery nutrition as a regular part of preparation.
- Meals at the championship venue may be available without being designed for performance. Choose as well as you can: prioritize protein and include salad, vegetables and fresh fruit when offered. Local treats will still be there after the game.
- Follow your usual eating and recovery routine as closely as possible; it is part of how you perform. Refuel at the practice site or soon afterward at the hotel.



OFFSEASON

Late January and February: Winter Conditioning

Your team determines the offseason schedule, but it commonly includes four weeks of winter conditioning before spring football. Intensity varies, yet this is often the year's toughest physical and mental training. Recovery nutrition is essential because pregame and travel meals may be absent. Greater energy, protein and nutrient needs must be met through meal-plan options that fit each athlete's timetable.

March and April: Spring Ball

Practices on alternate days still leave you balancing classes, conditioning and the mental work of learning next year's offense or defense. With limited practices to master plays and demonstrate your abilities, each repetition matters. Be ready to raise your performance whenever opportunities arise. Fueling through classes, meetings and practice also takes commitment:

- Ideally, eat two meals and one or two snacks before afternoon practice, and drink fluids all day.
- Make liquids part of your practice preparation, sipping during meetings until you leave for the field.
- Carry a water bottle, nuts, trail mix and favorite protein bars in your backpack. Use class breaks to fuel ahead of practice.

May: Active Rest

Enjoy family time, stay active and appreciate a break from football. Have favorite childhood foods that rarely fit your training routine. Share new menu ideas and demonstrate cooking skills you have learned. Enjoy this time and use it well.

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.