NUTRITION

FOR THE SOCCER STUDENT-ATHLETE



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> "I'd like to build speed and endurance so I can spend more time on the field. Friends say cutting gluten and dairy would be healthier, but now I'm unsure what to eat!"

Student-athletes encounter many myths about food and performance. Soccer demands strength, speed, agility and endurance. Players may complete each 45-minute half without a substitution, constantly moving, running and sprinting. Proper fueling is essential to sustain a high standard of play.

Information provided by

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FUELING VICTORY

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FUELING THE SOCCER STUDENT-ATHLETE

New college athletes often say, "There's no time to eat," or "I skipped eating because I didn't know what to choose."

Breakfast within an hour of waking supports energy balance, recovery and weight maintenance. Plan six daily fueling opportunities:

- **Snack before morning training:** Wheat bread with peanut butter.
- **Recovery drink after training:** Low-fat chocolate milk with a banana.
- **Breakfast:** Two scrambled eggs; ¾ cup oatmeal with cinnamon, berries and walnuts; Greek yogurt with granola.
- **Lunch:** Deli-meat sandwich on wheat bread, pretzels, fruit, yogurt and a 20-ounce sports drink.
- Before practice: Trail mix, banana and sports drink.
- **Dinner:** Lean protein, nutrient-rich carbohydrates (whole grains, vegetables and fruit) and low-fat dairy.

Hydration is another essential part of soccer nutrition. Rehearse the habits you will use in games: drink water and sports drink before, during and after practice to prepare your body for competition.

PRESEASON PHASE

Preseason lays the groundwork for success. At college level, January through May often serves as preseason. Adjust nutrition to build muscle, reduce fat and ready your body for competition. Strength sessions are usually harder now, making nutrient-rich foods and purposeful snacking especially useful.

Building Muscle and Reducing Fat in Preseason

- Refuel within 30 minutes after strength and conditioning.
- Limit extra calories from alcohol, sugary juices and processed snacks.
- Match eating to activity. Reduce portions and snacks on easy days. On hard training days, choose nutrient-rich snacks (nuts, trail mix, 2 percent milk string cheese, peanut butter and fruit), and pair carbs with protein at each meal.
- Drink water all day; adults often confuse thirst with hunger.
- Include lean protein at meals and snacks: chicken, turkey, pork or beef tenderloin, fish, canned tuna, edamame, deli meats, hummus, peanut butter, nuts and seeds.
- Favor complex carbs such as sweet potatoes, brown rice,



HYDRATION FOR SOCCER ATHLETES

2-3 hours before exercise: Have 17 to 20 ounces of water or sports drink.

10-20 minutes before exercise: Have 7 to 10 ounces of water or sports drink.

During exercise: Have 3 to 6 ounces of sports drink every 20 minutes.

After exercise: Drink 24 ounces of water or sports drink per pound lost. Within two hours, drink enough to replace the weight lost during exercise.



whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta and quinoa.
- Eat varied fruits and vegetables.
- Include healthy fats such as olive oil, flaxseed, avocados, seeds, nuts and nut butters.

COMPETITION PHASE

During the season, players need sound fueling and rapid recovery. Games often fall on Friday evenings and early Sunday afternoons, leaving little recovery time. Choose foods that aid repair and restore depleted glycogen.

10 Anti-Inflammatory Foods for Soccer Athletes

1. Salmon
2. Walnuts, almonds and other nuts
3. Beets
4. Berries
5. Dark leafy greens
6. Whole grains
7. Olive oil and flaxseed oil
8. Tart cherries
9. Soy beans
10. Low-fat dairy

Meals for a Competition Weekend

Eat Friday's pregame meal three to four hours before the match, emphasizing carbohydrate with moderate protein and fat. Choices include spinach salad, dinner rolls, beef tenderloin, chicken pesto pasta, roasted potatoes, steamed broccoli, fresh fruit, sports drink and low-fat milk.

Friday's recovery meal should supply lean protein, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals. Try a burrito with chicken, black beans, avocado, vegetables and shredded cheese, alongside sports drink and water.

Use Saturday for recovery without spending the entire day asleep or inactive. Eat regular meals and snacks and drink fluids to prepare for Sunday's game.

Sunday morning's fueling can affect the result. Eat breakfast three to four hours before kickoff: oatmeal with fruit and nuts, a vegetable-and-ham omelet, fruit with yogurt, orange juice and sports drink are options. Since the next meal will follow the game, have a snack en route. Try a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, smoothie, granola, dry cereal or granola bar, with plenty of sports drink for hydration.

After Sunday's match, relax and enjoy a food you especially like.



CHAMPIONSHIP/ POSTSEASON PHASE

The postseason - the period from November and December through early February, spans the holiday season, a challenging time for athletes. One poor meal does not undo months of training, but consistently poor eating can make preseason harder. Overeating or poor food choices may shift your goals from building muscle and refining technique to regaining fitness and losing fat.

Holiday Eating Tips for Soccer Athletes

- Notice your drinks. Juice, soda, alcohol and eggnog can supply many calories.
- Avoid going hungry all day; this can lead to overeating later.
- Have a small snack before a holiday party.
- Choose a smaller plate for smaller servings.
- Check all the options before deciding what to eat.
- Keep active. Play board games, take a walk or bring a soccer ball outdoors with family.
- Pick one dessert rather than many.
- Want another helping? Choose lean protein and vegetables.
- Add color to your plate. If everything is brown, nutrient-rich, lower-calorie foods are missing. Include sweet potatoes, steamed broccoli, cranberries and similar choices.
- Count extras: gravy, butter, syrup, whipped cream and sauces can add up.

OFFSEASON PHASE

Offseason runs from December and January until May, June or July, when soccer players train independently. Taking a full break from the



soccer routine is tempting. Still, good eating and regular activity help you return stronger and with greater endurance, easing the transition to preseason. Offseason nutrition aims to:

- Adjust nutrient intake to match changes in training and daily life.
- Expect possible shifts in body fat and weight, and recognize appropriate changes.
- Balance training volume with nutrient intake.

Young soccer players often overlook nutrition. Besides choosing less nutritious foods, both male and female players may eat too little or too much. Under-fueling causes fatigue, slower reactions and speed, and loss of muscle and fat. Poor food choices combined with low energy intake also raise female players' risk of iron deficiency. Over-fueling can cause sluggishness, reduced flexibility and speed, and more fat gain than muscle gain.

10 NUTRITION PRINCIPLES FOR SOCCER FUELING

1. Favor minimally processed foods. Limit added sugar, trans fat and saturated fat.

2. Add color. Eat a wide range of fruits and vegetables.

3. Include lean protein. Make it part of every meal.

4. Include healthy fats. Choose olive oil, flaxseed, fish, avocados, nuts and seeds.

5. Select whole-grain carbs. Their fiber and nutrients help fuel your body.

6. Start each day with breakfast. Break the overnight fast with protein, carbs and fluids to get metabolism going.

7. Eat to support training. Keep meals regular.

8. Keep hydrated. Dehydration lowers performance. Women need about 2.7 liters of fluid daily; men need about 3.7 liters of fluid and/or sports drink daily.

9. Refuel. Choose a recovery drink with a 4-1 carbohydrate-to-protein ratio within 30 minutes after exercise. Have a balanced meal within two hours.

10. Prioritize sleep. Aim for six to eight hours nightly to support recovery.



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