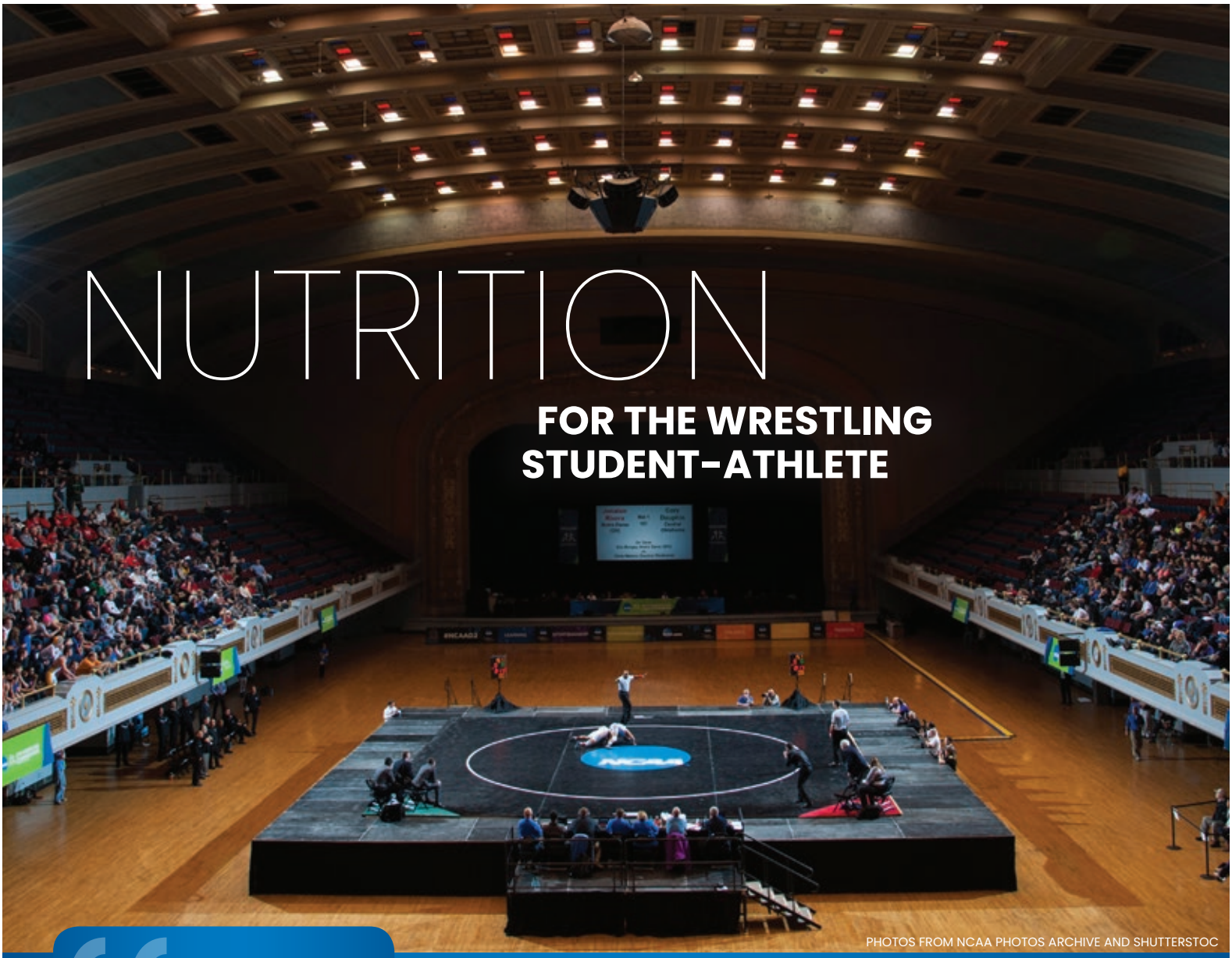


NUTRITION

FOR THE WRESTLING STUDENT-ATHLETE

PHOTOS FROM NCAA PHOTOS ARCHIVE AND SHUTTERSTOC

> "I'm a college wrestler who trains hard year-round, but I want to avoid weight struggles. How can I manage my weight over the year and let my body adjust to my intended class before the season begins?"

Wrestlers rely on strength to overpower opponents, quickness to evade them, stamina to outlast them and mental sharpness to outthink them. Matches combine power, endurance and technique. Scheduled for seven minutes, they may end early with a fall or run 11 minutes or longer in overtime. Fueling for competition matters, but it is only one part of performance. Maintaining or cutting weight can undermine results as readily as support them.

Information provided by

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OFFSEASON

The offseason offers time to build sound fueling habits without the pressure of making weight. Establish habits that support performance now and carry into preseason and competition. Focus on these fundamentals:

1. **Purpose**
   Match nutrition to your training goals: weight management, strength, endurance, injury recovery, and better focus and energy away from the mat.
2. **Quality**
   Choose nutrient-rich foods, including fresh, whole fruits and vegetables and whole grains. They provide sustained energy, aid training recovery and help you feel fuller.
3. **Quantity**
   Good training requires enough calories to meet energy use. Make weight-loss changes moderate, temporary and outside the competitive season.
4. **Timing**
   Spread fuel evenly through the day, giving special attention to food before and after workouts for training and recovery.
5. **Consistency**
   Keep intake balanced within each day and from day to day to support metabolism.
6. **Hydration**
   Blood carries nutrients to organs and muscles and removes waste. Hydration becomes even more important in season because it affects making weight.

PRESEASON

During preseason, gradually bring your body to a target weight that supports strong training and lets you make weight safely throughout the season.

Choosing Your Target Weight

Short-term weight loss of up to 5%, lasting no more than one day, has shown little effect on metabolism, lean body mass or strength.

When you are fueled and hydrated, normal training can change body weight by 2 to 3% or more in one workout. Two consecutive workouts may therefore produce a loss near 5%, mostly fluid. For most college wrestlers, setting a target about 5% above the weight class can help preserve size and strength while allowing weight to be made safely after two workouts.

If you enter preseason above your target, aim to lower body fat while retaining muscle. The body can lose only 1.5% of its weight from fat stores each week, so keep the calorie deficit limited. A greater deficit can break down muscle and reduce strength and performance.

Losing one pound weekly requires a daily deficit of 500 calories. Protein is the key fuel to support lean-tissue maintenance during a calorie deficit.

Note: Body fat should not fall below the safe minimum of 5% for college or 7% for high-school wrestlers. If below this level, ask your athletic trainer or sports dietitian which competitive weight class is most appropriate.



Fuel Balance for Weight Loss

- Protein (High). Eat 1.5 to two grams of lean protein per kilogram of body weight, spaced evenly through the day to maintain muscle.
- Carbohydrates (Moderate). Temporarily limit carbs to four to six grams per kilogram of body weight to create the calorie deficit needed to burn fat.
- Fat (Low). Keep fat at 15 to 25% of total calories. Include some fats from plants and fish, while limiting animal fats.
- Fruits and Vegetables. Eat these at each meal for recovery-supporting micronutrients and fiber that increases fullness.



COMPETITION PHASE/ CHAMPIONSHIP/ POSTSEASON

Competition begins after weight certification. Once you reach your target, shift attention to maintaining weight. Balance calories and adjust fuel sources to meet training and recovery needs.

Fuel Balance for Weight Maintenance

- Carbohydrates (Moderate to High). Eat five to eight grams of carbs per kilogram of body weight.
- Protein (Moderate to High). Choose 1.2 to two grams of protein per kilogram of body weight.
- Fat (Moderate). Choose heart-healthy plant and fish fats to help control inflammation and aid recovery.

Calorie balance is essential to health and performance in season. Persistently falling short of energy and carbohydrate needs can impair training and



recovery.

An ongoing calorie deficit during training can affect:

- Metabolism and muscle repair
- Physical energy
- Muscle endurance
- Fatigue
- Thinking and concentration
- Injury and illness
- Overtraining and burnout
- Academic performance
- Nutritional status, including bone and joint health

Making Weight

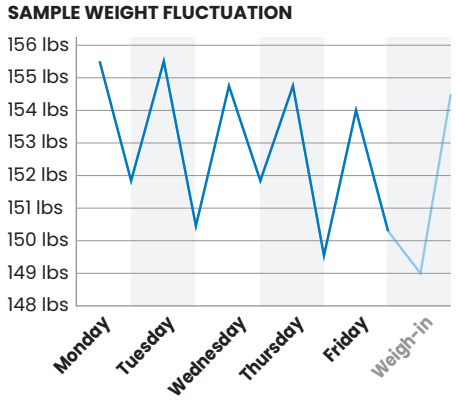
Meeting energy needs remains central to making weight safely and effectively. Adjustments to food and fluid should be small and temporary. After refueling following weigh-ins, aim to step on the mat at the same target weight used in training. Fueling throughout the week keeps the body functioning while it continues to excrete food waste and fluid during weight cutting. This allows weight to remain up to 5% above the class until the day before weigh-ins.

Keep energy intake and expenditure balanced during in-season training, including the 24 hours before weigh-ins. Calorie balance supports metabolism, muscle repair and maintenance or improvement of body composition. To do this, adjust your fuel sources. Choose energy-dense foods that supply needed fuel while helping clear unnecessary food waste.

Fuel Balance Before Weigh-Ins (24 to 48 hours)

- **Protein (High).** Protein supports muscle repair.
- **Fat (High).** Fish and plant fats and oils help meet calorie needs and reduce inflammation.
- **Fiber (Low).** Fiber adds weight, but supplies no energy.
- **Sodium (Low).** Limit sodium from added salt and processed foods.
- **Carbohydrate (Low). Reducing** carbs helps release water stored with glycogen, lowering muscle weight while sparing lean tissue. Refueling well after weigh-ins restores partly depleted glycogen.
- **Hydration.** Stay hydrated throughout the training week. Only in the last 24 hours before weigh-ins should mild dehydration occur by not fully replacing sweat losses from training. Adjust food and fluid composition rather than sharply cutting calories. Use your target weight to avoid excessive dehydration.

Making Weight Through Normal Training Patterns



Weight varies across the training week as fluid, glycogen and remaining food byproducts change. With adequate fuel and hydration, these shifts allow a weight slightly above your class. Working with normal training fluctuations supports in-season fueling without depriving muscles or causing excessive dehydration. Establishing and reaching a target in preseason helps ensure the energy and nutrients needed for effective training and recovery during competition.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT AND CUTTING: DO'S AND DON'TS

Don't ...

- Skip meals or snacks to reduce calories.
- Wait for the season to start your weight management plan.
- Reserve most calories for late in the day.
- Let "cheat days" undo your progress.
- Stay in a calorie deficit or restrict carbs all season.
- Let dieting or weight cutting disrupt training.
- Begin dehydrating more than 24 hours before weigh-ins.

Do ...

- Plan weight management and descent early.
- Choose a suitable target weight.
- Weigh before and after practice to learn your usual training weight changes and establish a target.
- Keep eating regular, balanced meals all season and especially after matches or tournaments.
- Refuel for recovery right after training, particularly in season.
- Plan and rehearse refueling and rehydration after weigh-ins.
- Use a multivitamin to cover possible nutrient gaps.



Fuel for a Match or Tournament

Effective match or tournament fueling directly supports performance, restoring fuel after weigh-ins and preparing you for competition.

Pre-Match Fueling Priorities

- Fluids and Electrolytes. Replace fluid lost while making weight immediately after weigh-ins. Sodium is especially important for rehydrating muscle and restoring power and endurance. Foods and drinks offer several sources.
- Sugar. Give your muscles one to 1.2 grams of sugar per kilogram of body weight to stimulate glycogen rebuilding. Excess sugar may upset the stomach and cause low energy later.
- Carbohydrates (High). Starches supply longer-lasting energy for the match while continuing to restore glycogen.
- Protein (Moderate). Eating 20 to 25 grams supports muscle repair and helps fluid absorption and stomach tolerance.

Tournament Fueling Priorities

- Carbohydrates. Carbs supply energy for matches. Carry easy options like crackers, pretzels, granola bars, bread, cereal or energy bars.
- Avoid excesses. Limit too much fat, excess or added fiber, and excess sugar.
- Fluid and sodium. Replace both regularly through the day.

A scientific, systematic plan can greatly reduce the effort and worry of making weight. Take an appropriate, proactive and professional approach to weight management so you can concentrate on enjoying wrestling.



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