



Fueling Athletes With Healthy, Budget-Friendly Foods

By Amy Reuter MS, RD, CD

Food is fuel! As soccer athletes mature, their intensity increases, as do their energy needs. Maintaining high intensity throughout a match or practice requires an adequate intake of nutrient-rich foods daily. Yet, too often nutrient-rich foods are seen as more costly, leaving well-intentioned parents questioning how they can feed their soccer athletes without paying a fortune.

Thankfully, eating well does not need to be expensive. Here are 10 nutrient-rich and budget-friendly foods to incorporate into a soccer athlete's training diet in 2010.

1. **Bananas.** Wrapped in yellow jackets, bananas are portable, carbohydrate-rich fruits for athletes on the go. Their rich potassium content also helps soccer athletes maintain muscle control and avoid muscle cramps. Stash a banana or two into a backpack or soccer bag for a quick afternoon treat. Keep several in the freezer to mix into fruit-and-yogurt smoothies or pancakes.
2. **Beans (Dried and Canned).** Packed with protein and fiber, beans make a healthy addition to soups, salads and rice. No need to be in a rush to use beans. Dried beans remain fresh for up to a year and canned beans last two years. Stock the pantry with an assortment of beans including black, garbanzo, pinto and lentil.
3. **Canned wild (Alaskan) salmon.** Served warm or cold, canned salmon is a rich source of protein and omega-3 fatty acids at a fraction of the cost of fresh salmon. Calcium is an added benefit of canned salmon with bones. These bones are soft and edible, supplying 200 mg of calcium per 3 oz. serving.
4. **Eggs.** With a refrigerator shelf life of up to three weeks, eggs are another low-cost, high-quality protein source to have on hand. From omelets and egg salad sandwiches to frittatas, eggs can be served at any meal or kept hard-boiled in the refrigerator for an afternoon snack.

5. **Frozen Berries.** With vitamin C to strengthen the immune system, fiber to sustain energy and antioxidants to combat oxidative damage to cells, berries are nutrient powerhouses. Plus, quick-freezing of just-picked berries preserves freshness and nutrient content. Eat frozen berries straight from the freezer, add to muffins or blend them into fruit-and-yogurt smoothies.
6. **Frozen mixed vegetables.** Looking for a quick, inexpensive way to boost the vitamin and mineral content of a meal with minimal effort? Grab a bag of frozen mixed vegetables and add them to omelets, pasta sauces and soups.
7. **Oats.** Full of whole-grain carbohydrates, oats provide athletes with energy and fiber. Heat a bowl of oatmeal for a nutritious start to the day. Sprinkle diced fruit, chopped nuts or seeds on a bowl of oatmeal for added nutrients and flavor.
8. **Peanut butter.** A peanut butter and jelly sandwich containing two tablespoons of peanut butter (equal in size to a ping-pong ball) supplies athletes with protein while satisfying their hunger. In addition to protein, peanut butter provides another 12-plus vitamins and minerals to maintain normal body functioning.
9. **Sweet potatoes.** Make room for sweet potatoes. A weekly addition of these high-fiber, potassium-rich, vitamin C-rich and beta-carotene-rich tubers to the dinner menu can enhance a soccer athlete's physical conditioning. Try baking sweet potatoes whole, or roasting slices in a small amount of olive oil.
10. **Yogurt.** Calcium-rich yogurt provides the building block for strong, healthy bones. Additional nutrients in yogurt – including protein, potassium and riboflavin – work synergistically to promote the healthy growth and development of young soccer athletes. Yogurt can be eaten plain, blended into smoothies, whipped into vegetable dips or layered between fruit and granola in a yogurt parfait.

Still looking for ways to cut food costs? Try these additional tips for shaving costs without sacrificing nutrients or flavor:

- Fill up on specific fruits when they are in-season.
- Go generic with canned beans, peanut butter and ready-to-eat cereals.
- Choose blocks of cheese and slice or grate at home as needed.
- Bolt to the bulk foods section to obtain rice, dried fruit, oats and pasta.

Eating well can be affordable. By adopting several of these cost-saving tips, along with stocking up on healthy, budget-friendly foods, athletes can enjoy eating nutritious, flavorful foods without spending a fortune.



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