

Fitting Nutrition into an Active Life

--Amy Reuter MS, RD

Youth soccer players are frequently “on the go” to school, to home, to practice and often other stops in-between. Finding time to eat can be a challenge. In the morning, sleep can take priority over eating leaving little if any time for breakfast between a shower and a dash to school. A lengthy lunch line can lead to inhaling a partial meal. Then, an after school soccer practice can minimize post school snacks. Fortunately, nutritional needs of soccer athletes do not need to suffer. Youth soccer players can make time to eat a nutritious diet despite their tight schedules. Planning for and scheduling routine snack times or “on-the-go” meals can keep soccer athletes energized throughout the day.

Food is Fuel. Skipping breakfast and eating minimally at lunch does NOT fuel muscles for an intense soccer practice or game. The brain also needs food to optimize learning in the classroom and performance on the field after school. Developing a morning routine that prioritizes eating well will help athletes to start the day focused and energized. Restocking depleted energy stores with a midday meal can equip athletes for their afternoon activities. Starting each day with a healthy breakfast and making time for a nutrient rich lunch keeps an athlete primed for action both on the field and off.

Planning is key. Maintaining a supply of nutritious foods in the refrigerator and in the pantry can facilitate meal preparation. Use these Fridge & Pantry Staple ideas below to encourage soccer athletes to think beyond the cereal box for breakfast and beyond a turkey and cheese sandwich for lunch. Eating a variety of foods from each of the Five Food Groups (Grain, Vegetable, Fruit, Milk and Meat & Bean) will maximize nutrient intake as well as interest.

Fridge /Pantry Staples:

Fresh Fruit	Low fat yogurt	Low fat granola
Dried Fruit	Low fat milk	Nuts & Nut butters
100% fruit juices	Low fat cottage cheese	Eggs
Whole-grain cereals & breads	String cheese	Lean Deli Meats
Instant oatmeal	Low fat cheese	Canned tuna
Graham crackers	Bagels	

You can take it with you. Sitting down to eat at meal or snack time aids digestion and relaxation. However, when this is not possible, grabbing a meal or snack to eat during the commute for the car is better than doing without the needed fuel.

Try several of these Grab-n-Go Breakfast, Lunch and Snack Ideas:

- Low fat yogurt and a small whole-grain muffin
- Breakfast smoothies containing orange juice, yogurt, banana or frozen fruit and what germ
- Low fat yogurt and a bag of trail mix
- A cereal or granola bar low in fat and sugar with a 100% fruit juice box
- A thermos of instant breakfast mixed with a nonfat or 1% fat milk.
- Low fat turkey and cheese wrapped in a tortilla.
- A handful of almonds, bunch of grapes and string cheese.
- A toasted bagels topped with peanut butter or light cream cheese and an apple
- A slice of cheese pizza, carton of low fat chocolate milk and a banana.
- Apple and banana slices dipped in peanut butter
- Low-fat yogurt topped with fresh fruit and granola
- Crackers or carrots with hummus

Hydrate throughout the day. Encourage athletes to drink water throughout the day. Keeping a water bottle on a desk or in a backpack can serve as a visual reminder to drink. Drinking low fat milk and 100% fruit juice at meals provide nutrients along with fluid.

Slip a healthy snack and drink into an athlete’s soccer bag. Snacks are an excellent way for athletes to fill in the nutrient and energy gaps before or after practice. Here are several soccer bag snack ideas:

Snacks for the Soccer bag:

Dry Cereal	Sports Drink
Low-fat cereal or granola bar	Banana
Turkey or beef jerky	Dried Fruit and Nut Mixes
Oatmeal raisin cookies	Pretzels
Animal crackers	Fat-Free or low fat pudding cups

Keep a food journal. Tracking food and fluid intakes via a food journal can help athletes customize their nutrition training plans. Include type and amount of food, time, location and comments on performance. Then use this information to modify snack and training diet as needs. Finding the winning combinations of food and knowing when to eat them can help soccer athletes maximize their energy on the field.

With a little planning and lots of encouragement, soccer athletes can find time to fuel their bodies and brains to meet both scholastic and athletic pursuits. Enjoy the journey to good health and peak performance!