

# BE A STRONG ATHLETE

## Eat Well-Balanced Meals

- > Color your way to a healthy day by trying to eat different colored fruits and vegetables.
- > Never skip meals — especially not breakfast!
- > Pack healthy snacks when you know you'll be on-the-go. (Examples: baby carrots, fresh or dried fruits and water bottles.)
- > Timing of meals can be critical. Too much or too little food prior to activity can leave you sluggish. Eat a large meal 3 to 4 hours before a game or eat a small meal 2 hours before a game.

## Stay Hydrated

- > Drink plenty of water before, during and after you play soccer or any other sport. You need water to replace fluids you lose through perspiration (sweating).
- > Replace sodas and sugary drinks with water or milk. Be sure to keep drinks cool.
- > Sports drinks are a good choice when sweat loss is excessive due to high temperatures. They have electrolytes and supply carbohydrates to keep blood sugar from falling.

## Eat Complex Carbohydrates

- > Instead of eating sugary sweets, make sure your body gets complex carbohydrates such as pasta, whole grain breads, rice and cereal.
- > Carbohydrates are needed for your muscles and brain during exercise.

## Eat Before You Play

- > Don't come to the field on an empty stomach. If you haven't eaten in the past few hours, have a light, healthy snack before leaving home. Avoid sugary junk foods which will only give you a quick burst of energy and won't last through your game.
- > Eat a healthy meal 2 to 3 hours before practice or a game so your body has plenty of time to digest the food.

## Build Strong Bones

- > Drink lots of milk and eat foods with calcium such as yogurt and cheese.
- > Make a milkshake! Blend milk, your favorite fruit and ice together in a blender for a nice, cool treat!

## Get Your Vitamins

- > Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables so you get plenty of vitamins every day!

## Warm Up & Cool Down

- > You can warm up before practice by jogging slowly around the soccer field a couple of times.
- > Do a few gentle stretches to get your muscles warm and limber. Hold the stretch about 10 seconds. Don't bounce!
- > Don't sit down while your heart is still beating fast. End your practice by walking for a couple of minutes to let your heart slow down.
- > Always end your practice with stretching. Hold the stretch for about 15 seconds.

## Refuel

- > Continue to drink fluids while you play.
- > If you play longer than usual, you may need a healthy snack to help you refuel.
- > Pack a healthy snack so you will have something to eat 15 to 20 minutes after practice or games — something with carbohydrates and protein. Your body needs a little snack to replace all the food you used while playing.
- > Post game meals should be rich in carbohydrates and protein.

## Rest & Relax

- > Make sure you get plenty of sleep every night and take some time to relax after practice or a game. Your body needs to recover from all that work!

## Reward Yourself

- > Pick something you'd like to do as a reward instead of stopping for fast food or eating sweets.
- > Create a bulletin board where you can display some "action shots" and list all your accomplishments.

## Protect Your Skin

- > Apply sunscreen before you leave home so it has time to dry before you play.
- > Reapply sunscreen after sweating, getting wet or toweling off.

## Prevent Injuries

- > Wear proper-fitting shoes and make sure your laces are tied tight and tucked in so you don't trip yourself or anyone else.
- > Wear protective equipment, including shin guards, goalie masks, and any other protective gear suggested by your coach.
- > Never wear watches or any other jewelry. These items can cause deep cuts if you fall hard, and they can also scratch other players.