

Health

Game-day Nutrition: Food Is Fuel for High-Cardio Athletes

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Donzell Hill (44) for Millbrook takes a jumper against Middle Creek defenders. Athletes need proper fuel to perform at this high level (Photo by A.L. Garrett).

The right food and beverages, consumed at the right time on game days can make a difference for a teen athlete, particularly one who is involved in a high-cardio sport like basketball, football or soccer. Teen athletes are young and strong, but their lightning-fast metabolisms can work against them if they do not have the proper fuel for their engines before, during and after the game.

three or four hours before the game and finish with a fueling snack an hour (up to 500 calories and more than 16 ounces of fluids) before the game. Fruits, vegetables, sandwiches (peanut butter and jelly, lean meats, cheese, etc.) on whole grain bread, cheese snacks, yogurt and juice are some great lunch choices.

Half Time

Push fluids and carbohydrates at half time. Water, sports drinks, fruit, pretzels and crackers are quick and easy.

After the Game

Recovery nutrition within 30 minutes after an activity is vital to restore energy and repair muscle. Replace energy with a low-calorie (about 250) mix of carbohydrates and protein and 16 ounces or more of fluids. Try selections like crackers, bread, yogurt, fresh fruit, granola, cereal, chocolate milk and water.

Tournament Play

Start fueling the night before with a healthy dinner of complex carbohydrates, lean protein and plenty of fluids. Some good choices are whole wheat pasta with lean meat sauce and a small salad, or grilled chicken, brown rice and vegetables. Have a good snack before bedtime, like a peanut butter sandwich and low-fat milk.

Keep fueling if you have more than one game a day. As a general rule, consume a medium-sized snack like a half of a sandwich and fruit or yogurt every hour if your next game is in two hours. Replenish your muscles with protein by having a snack with small amounts of meat, peanut butter, cheese or nuts. As always, stay hydrated.

Stick to the Basics

- Eat about five times a day (breakfast, snack, lunch, snack, dinner)
- Never skip breakfast
- Consume healthy, high-fiber carbs but don't forget protein for muscle recovery
- Proper portions – Eat a portion that keeps you satisfied for only three hours
- Get plenty of sleep – It impacts weight control, energy level, caloric intake and hydration
- Choose sports drinks over water when you are sweating a lot; it's hot; and the session lasts more than an hour
- Young athletes need iron, calcium and antioxidants, so eating healthy is extremely important
- Hydrate continuously! Drink plenty of caffeine free fluids

February Is Heart Month

Remember: Heart disease strikes people of all ages. Regular exercise and a heart-healthy diet can help control some heart disease risk factors, including high cholesterol, obesity and high blood pressure. Ask your doctor about the steps you and your family can take to stay heart-healthy.

Pregame

Proper nutrition is key. You need lots of energy, but you also need time to digest your meal. The blood your body uses to digest food is also used by your muscles during activity. If you eat too close to game time, food will stay in your stomach too long and make you sluggish.

Your pre-game meal should consist of:

- High-carbohydrate foods (complex carbs with fiber)
- Low-fat protein foods like lean meats, peanut butter and eggs
- Water for hydration and digestion
- Whole grain breads, cereals, yogurt, pasta, crackers and oatmeal are great pregame choices.

Meal portions should keep you satisfied for just three hours. Get the bulk of your calories in before the game. These rules apply to training days, too. Greasy food, fried food, high-fat meats, sweets, spicy selections, large salads and caffeine are no-no's before the game. Eat foods that are familiar to you.

Morning Event

Start fueling at least two hours before your game. First, have a healthy breakfast that includes the right mix:

- Eggs, oatmeal, berries, juice
- Egg and cheese sandwich, fruit, milk
- Cereal (whole grain), low-fat milk, fruit, juice
- Pancakes, yogurt, juice

Next, have a snack one hour before game time. Have up to 500 calories of food and more than 16 ounces of fluids. Quick and easy snacks are granola bars, crackers, raisins, dry cereal, yogurt, fresh fruit and pretzels. Water is the best drink choice, but juice boxes and sports drinks are also winners.

Afternoon Event

Fuel three times before an afternoon game. Start with a small meal when you wake up, follow with another small meal