

Gaining a Competitive Edge Through Nutrition

Athletes of any age want to perform their best and youth athletes are no exception. In addition to a good training program and individual athletic ability, a sound nutrition plan will help athletes maximize performance. Athletes must be aware of how much to eat and drink before, during, and after exercise to strengthen their performance.



Youth athletes need a high quality diet that supports individual growth needs, and includes the right balance of carbohydrates, protein, and fat, and provides sufficient quantities of vitamins, minerals, and water. It is estimated that female teenage athletes need approximately 2,400 calories a day. Teenage boys require about 2,800 calories a day. Some athletes may require an additional 500 to 1,000 calories to support exercise.

The **USDA MyPyramid** is a **menu planning tool** that can be used by athletes. Athletes having medical concerns requiring specific dietary adjustments should contact their health care professional and a **Registered Dietitian** to help with individual menu planning and timing of meals and snacks.

Carbohydrates, the body's fuel of choice for athletes, should comprise at least 50 percent of their diet. Protein builds and repairs muscle tissue and is essential for the growing athlete. It should be included in most meals and snacks. Healthy fats make up the balance of calories for the athlete.



Water is the most important nutrient for youth athletes and needs to be monitored very closely. **Dehydration can limit athletic performance** and can lead to more serious health problems. Children and teens should be encouraged to drink water throughout the day, as well as during and after exercise.

Before exercise, meals or snacks should contain carbohydrate-rich foods, some protein and limited fat. Meeting fluid needs is a priority for exercise lasting less than an hour. After exercise, replacing lost fluids and eating a healthy combination of protein and carbohydrate-rich foods **assist the recovery process**.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR FLUID INTAKE (depending on age and size):

24 hours before event	hydrate well	
2 hours before event or workout	8-16 ounces (8-16 large gulps)	
15 minutes before event	8-16 ounces (8-16 large gulps)	
Every 15-20 minutes during event	5-10 ounces (5-10 large gulps)	
After event	Drink 24 ounces (24 large gulps) for every pound lost	

Athletes who practice well and routinely eat a healthy, balanced diet will be able to perform their best. The timing of fluids, meals, and snacks on days that athletes exercise and compete will greatly influence how they feel and will give them that competitive edge!

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