



Soccer Nutrition

Introduction

Why is it that some days you feel like you have no energy during games or practice and other days you feel like you can run forever? The answer to this question most of the time is NUTRITION. What you eat and drink before and during competition is critical towards your performance on the field.

The following guide is a reference as to what types of foods will give you a better chance to perform at the peak levels of your physical condition. It is only a reference because the energy production and digestive systems of every individual are different. I encourage you to experiment with the different foods and timings presented below. Make notes of your level of energy during competition/practice until you find the right type of meals consumed at the right time of the day that will give you peak performance.

As with most aerobic sports, the ideal meal for a soccer player must be rich in carbohydrates. Before matches or important events, it is recommended to increase carbohydrate intake and decrease proteins. Consuming meals consisting primarily of carbohydrates has been shown to improve endurance and overall performance. The target intake is 60-70% carbohydrate and 10-15% protein.

Following, you will find a dietary time-frame program leading to the competition time.



10-12hrs prior to competition

This is a very important meal, as the main energy reserves are made up from the previous day's meals, not from the pre-game meal or big breakfast of the competition day.

Drinks	Meal Items	Desserts, Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports Drink • Water • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spaghetti • Tomato Sauce with Meat • Rice (steam or boiled) • Lean Meat • Fish • Poultry • Potatoes • Cooked dried peas, beans or lentils • Salad (very low dressing) • Vegetables (fresh, frozen or canned) • Pizza, (Cheese & Veggie) • Bread, all varieties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese and Crackers • Popcorn (no butter) • Fruit - fresh or dried • Sherbet, 1 scoop • Pretzels • Plain Biscuits

Flour and starch-based foods are a good source of carbohydrates.
Examples: bread, potatoes, pasta, cereal, low-fat dairy products

AVOID:

Nutrient-poor carbohydrates:

- Jam, jelly, white sugar, marshmallows, jelly beans etc.

Fat:

- Chocolate, potato chips, tacos, nachos
- Gravy, sauces, salad dressing, butter, margarine
- Fried Foods
- High fat cold cuts (bologna, salami, sausage)



Pre-Game Meal 2-4hrs prior to competition

The pre-game meal offers very little for the energy production system, however it can do much damage if the wrong foods are consumed. It has been suggested that the player enter the game with the stomach as empty as possible (but not feeling hungry). When there is food in the stomach, the heart pumps large volumes of blood to the stomach to aid in digestion. If playing or practicing, however, the blood is shunted to the working muscles, therefore stopping the digestive process. This often causes stomach cramps and gas, making the player very uncomfortable.

On most competition days the breakfast is the pre-game meal.

Drinks	Meal Items	Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports Drink • Water • Hot Chocolate • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels • Raisin Bran • Toast, 2-3 slices • Yogurt • Muffin, Bran - Oatmeal • Pancakes (low butter / syrup) • Bread, all varieties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit bars • Fig Newtons • Fruit - fresh or dried • Raisins • Banana

AVOID:

Fat:

- Bacon, sausage, excess butter / margarine etc.

Fried Foods:

- Home fries, hash browns, fried/scrambled eggs etc.



If Lunch is the pre-game meal you can use as a reference the suggestions from the prior-day meal in addition to the following:

Drinks	Meal Items	Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports Drink • Water • Milk Shake • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwich (2oz meat, fish or poultry) • Cup of stock soup • Bagels • Vegetables • Bread, all varieties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit bars • Fig Newtons • Fruit - fresh or dried • Raisins • Apple • Banana • Cheese and crackers • Pretzels- Saltines

AVOID:

Fat:

- Excess butter / margarine etc., Salami, bologna, sausage, hamburgers, hot-dogs

Fried Foods:

- French fries, home fries, hash browns etc.

Snacks 0-2 hrs before competition

The goal is to reach competition time with an empty stomach but not feeling hungry. In case you are feeling hungry you can supplement your diet with the following:

Drinks	Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Sports Drink 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit bars Fig • Fig Newtons • Fruit- fresh or dried • Raisins • Apple • Banana



Post-Game Recovery

During games you sweat, and when you sweat, you lose two important substances that your body needs: water and certain minerals called electrolytes (the stuff that makes sweat taste salty). After games, you need to put these substances back into your body in an amount equal to what you lost, and you need to do it sooner rather than later.

Your muscles are mostly made of proteins. During games, many muscle proteins get damaged and destroyed. This is one reason your legs feel sore and weak after games. The good news is that your body is able to build new muscle proteins at two to three times the normal rate after hard exercise. All you need to do is supply enough proteins to do the job by consuming protein in the first hour after the game is over.

The easiest way to get water, electrolytes, and proteins back into your system is with a sport drink.

-Drink at least 12oz. of a sport drink containing protein.

After you play a game, try not to do anything too strenuous for the rest of the day. Your body requires rest in order to re-hydrate, re-energize, and rebuild the muscles. At the very least, be sure to get plenty of sleep that night. During sleep, your body releases hormones that help your muscles rebuild.

Hydration

During matches or practice, your body will lose a lot of water. It is VERY important to make sure you are well hydrated BEFORE you start playing or practicing and that you stay hydrated DURING exercise. Drink between 500 grams to 1 liter (up to 24 ounces) two hours prior to kick off. During exercise, you should ideally consume at least 100-200 grams (6 ounces) each 20 minutes.

Remember also that when you feel thirsty you are already getting de-hydrated; drink before you get thirsty, especially when playing in hot weather.

AVOID:

Any liquids that causes dehydration:

- Anything with caffeine (soda, coffee, etc)
- Anything with a lot of sweets (artificially sweetened juices)
- Alcohol



Final Words

Although the recommended diet prior to competition for a soccer player is high in carbohydrates, low in proteins, and very little fat, you should maintain a balanced diet that includes proteins and fats as recommended by the FDA during the rest of the days.