

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.

Fueling and Hydrating Active Children



by Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD, CDN

When young people are athletic or very active, their need for food and fluids is higher. If you have specific concerns about your child's intake regarding sports, consult your family doctor or a registered dietitian.

Below are tips to help active kids get the food and fluids they need:

FOODS

Athletes need food with lots of nutrients and minimal amounts of fat and added sugar. High-quality carbohydrates from whole-grains, fruits, vegetables and dairy foods are especially important. Children need extra energy for their sport's practices and games, plus normal levels for growth and development.

Here's how to provide the energy they need:

Serve a balanced breakfast. Offer whole-grain cereals, waffles or muffins with fruit, like bananas, blueberries and apples. Create a yogurt parfait with layers of low-fat yogurt; fresh or frozen fruit and crunchy whole-grain cereal or chopped nuts. When morning practices or road trips make breakfast difficult, pack a bag with a bagel, fruit, string cheese, yogurt cup, juice box, etc. for eating on the run.

Pack a healthy snack. Traveling athletes need healthy snacks. Fill an insulated bag with high-energy snacks. Use frozen juice boxes, water bottles or reusable gel packs to keep items cold. Provide pre- and post-game snacks like crackers and cheese, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; trail mix, fruit or vegetables with dip.

FLUIDS

All athletes, including children, need fluids to stay well hydrated. Fluids are critical to prevent overheating and to remove the wastes produced by active muscles. Being even slightly dehydrated can affect performance.

Teach children to monitor fluid intake. Regular trips to the bathroom with basically clear, nearly odorless urine indicate good hydration. Not having to urinate or producing dark-yellow, strong-smelling urine means it's time to drink more.

Increase fluid with activity. Children need to drink at least six 8-ounce cups of water per day. Add another 8 ounces for every half hour of strenuous activity. Give kids a water bottle to carry in the car, on the bus, at school and on the field.

Choose beverages carefully. Water is always a great choice. For activities lasting less than an hour, water will provide optimal hydration. For longer activities, water as well as diluted 100 percent fruit juice or sports drinks may be provided.

Resources:

Play Hard, Eat Right. By Debbi Sowell Jennings,
The American Dietetic Association.

