

## "Nutrition: Fueling the Soccer Player"

You'd be amazed at the important role nutrition plays in the performance of athletes. Many of today's professional athletes have hired nutritionists to help them with their daily diet routines. In theory, making sure our athletes eat right and eat healthy seems like a terrific idea. In practice, well, let's just say it is easier said than done.

Recently, I attended the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) annual convention where I attended a seminar conducted by Michelle Rockwell, a professional sports nutritionist. I have since then kept in touch with her in regards to some of the questions I have been asked by parents and athletes and she has been very responsive.

Michelle and others in the nutrition field agree that the daily diet of an athlete should contain:

- 60 percent carbohydrates (for energy) -- bread, cereal, rice, pasta, fruits and vegetables
- 15 percent protein (for muscle growth and recovery) -- lean meats, eggs, dairy products, nuts, beans
- 25 percent fat (for overall health) -- fish, oils, seeds

Obviously, these are healthy foods, and they can help you, the parent, "fuel" your athlete on a regular basis. But my main concern was: "What about game day?" How can parents help their child fuel up properly on game day?

Here are some of Michelle's suggestions:

### PRE-GAME MEAL

Have the athlete complete eating a full meal 3 hours prior to the kickoff time. Include in this meal lots of carbs, some protein and very little fat. Be sure to include at least one serving of a fruit or vegetable. Serve absolutely no caffeine. Water or a sports drink. One hour before kickoff, have a small snack (more on this later) and a bottle of sports drink such as Gatorade.

### HALFTIME

Oranges seem to be the favorite here and that is fine. But so are bananas, watermelon, apples, pretzels, honey, gummy fruit snacks and graham crackers. Sports drinks (Gatorade) get the nod by professionals over water. (Side Note: In a recent article by the folks from Gatorade, a study was conducted on soccer players. Those who drank a bottle of Gatorade at halftime had far less fatigue in the second half than those who drank water. Other studies have been conducted as well with similar results. So in this case, at halftime, the "Great Debate: Sports Drinks vs. Water" is really a no-brainer.)

### IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MATCH

Yogurt, trail mix, a granola bar and a sports drink are preferred here. Athletes should consume these small snacks immediately after playing.

One of the other questions I had concerned practices during the week, especially those practices that are scheduled an hour or two right after school. Michelle offered this tip:

### SNACKS FOR THE BACKPACK

Dried fruits, nuts, dry cereal, sports bars, cereal bars, nutrition shales, yogurt, string cheese, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (my all-time favorite for whatever that is worth!), and a sports drink. All are digested quickly and are healthy. Michelle also suggested asking your child what he or she ate at lunchtime. Parents should look at lunch as being an athlete's "pre-training session" meal.

For more information on nutrition, go to [www.usda.gov/cnpp](http://www.usda.gov/cnpp).