

Nutritional Ideas For The Elite Child

Do you have a child that is playing a lot of sport or intends to?

My baby boy is a 15yr 194cm (6ft 4in) size 14 shoe wearing representative basketball player, and I would like a dollar for every time a parent of a child, doing a lot of sport, has come up to me asking for advice of one kind or another.

Most parents want to feed their youth athletes better but just don't know what components of good nutrient-rich foods are. Sometimes parents also are unaware of the importance of planning correctly so that these nutrients work effectively and efficiently for the athlete. Parents often ask me what the appropriate food is for their child and the game starts in 30 minutes! At that point nothing is really going to help that child in that particular event. We as parents have a responsibility to fuel and hydrate our children properly before they get to the event.

It's never too early to teach good eating and training habits. These elements go equally hand-in-hand with each other, but some parents consider the training more important than the fuel.

The key elements of required nutrients are macronutrients such as carbohydrates, protein and fats and micronutrients such as vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and water. Macronutrients are required in larger doses than micronutrients. These are best eaten in a whole food source when at all possible and should complement each other in a balanced diet. The balance of both macronutrients and micronutrients, dictate the type of hormonal response your body will have. Every time you eat, it starts a new hormonal activation that last 4-6 hours.

The influence of protein, carbohydrates and fat, as it impacts insulin and glycogen, is very significant so what and when we eat can impact and affect training and event performances.



Carbohydrates - sugar and starches are the most readily available source of food energy. After intake through digestion and metabolism, all carbohydrates are broken down into the simple sugar glucose for the body to use as a main energy source. Glucose is stored in the muscles and liver as glycogen, later to be used for primary fuel in activities such as sports and other physical activities. If the proper amount and the proper kind of carbohydrate are not ingested, the stores of glycogen in the muscles will deplete leaving the athlete without proper fuel and can cause fatigue and less than optimum performance, physically and emotionally.

What are the best carbohydrates for good health in an athlete?

Nutrient dense carbohydrates, like whole grain breads, cereals, pastas, fruit and vegetables are the best. If you have a question on what is a whole food ask yourself if it comes from the ground with natural ingredients or not. It's interesting to note that when our young athletes need the best carbohydrate source quickly, many athletes (and parents) will choose donuts, cookies, lollies and chocolate for "quick energy" but this will ultimately deplete them even more.

Training sessions and game days

It's important for kids to eat well on these days. The meal itself should not be very different from what they normally eat. Meals should be eaten 3 or more hours before activity - they should have plenty of carbs and a moderate amount of protein but be low in fat because fat takes longer to digest, which can cause an upset stomach. High-fiber foods may also cause some stomach upset, so it's best to avoid these foods until after the game.

If kids eat less than 3 hours before game or practice, serve a lighter meal or snack that includes easy-to-digest carbohydrate-containing foods, such as fruit, fruit or vegetable juice, rice crackers, or bread.

After the game or event, experts recommend eating carbohydrates such as fruit, vegetable juice, pretzels or a sports drink to replenish energy stores. Within 30 minutes of intense activity completing it's important that the post-game meal be a balance of lean protein, carbs, and fat. A good source of protein includes a turkey, chicken or salmon sandwich. According to fit for life online's Nutritionist/Naturopath Winona Stephens "practitioner-range protein powders or bars will help with repair and rebuilding your child's muscle tissue."

It's also important to ensure that children replace fluids and electrolytes for up to 24 hours after the competition. And remember, when packing your child's bag for the big day to add a water bottle and sports drink. Water is the best during the game or training sessions and the sports drink is best at the end of the game or training session.

Meal and snack suggestions

Always start with a nutrient full breakfast. A good breakfast for young athletes might include natural fruit yogurt with some granola or home made muesli and a banana, or whole-grain cereal or porridge and milk with sliced strawberries, or boiled egg or Baked Beans on wholegrain toast. Try bean burritos with cheese, lettuce, and tomatoes or a turkey, chicken or salmon sandwich and fruit for lunch. For dinner, serve grilled chicken breasts or fish with steamed rice and vegetables, or pasta with red sauce and lean

ground beef, along with a salad. Good snacks include low salt pretzels, sultanas, almonds, apricots, crackers, cheese, or cut up fruit.

It's important to feed your child healthy meals and snacks consistently, even during the off-season. This will provide a solid foundation during times of competition.

Blueberry green smoothie

Fruits and vegetables are loaded with antioxidants. Young athletes can really benefit from a good source of carbohydrate with a great balance of vitamins and minerals before a long day of physical activity. Give it a try!

Ingredients:

- 2 cups water
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 1/2 cups frozen (or unfrozen) blueberries
- 1 frozen (or unfrozen, frozen is better) banana
- 1 tablespoon EFA oil
- 2 tablespoons (or to taste) agave nectar or honey (you could mix in some "practitioner-range multi vitamins and protein powders" into this smoothie for additional supplementation – check with your naturopath first)

Instructions:

Put all ingredients into blender and blend it for about 1 minute or until the spinach is totally obliterated. If you didn't use frozen fruit this smoothie will not be as thick. You can always add some ice to it if you like it chilled.

Serves: 1-2

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Stovetop granola

This is a delicious quick and easy granola with almonds and dried cranberries, made easily on the stovetop. Feel free to add your favorite dried fruits and nuts too.

Ingredients:

- 30 ml olive oil
- 160 g rolled oats
- 30 ml honey
- 50 g packed brown sugar
- 70 g chopped almonds
- 40 g dried cranberries

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add oats then cook and stir until starting to brown and crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and spread out on a cookie sheet to cool.

Melt a small amount of butter in the same pan over medium heat. Stir in the honey and brown sugar; cook, stirring constantly, until bubbly. Return the oats to the pan. Cook and stir for another 5 minutes or so. Pour out onto the cookie sheet and spread to cool.

Once cool, transfer to an airtight container and stir in the almonds and dried cranberries. Any additional nuts and fruit can be stirred in at this time also.

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Useful websites:

www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/fosnackj.htm

www.kidshealth.org

www.sportsnutrition.org