



EAT to

COMPETE

A Coach's Playbook for a
WINNING TEAM

Eat to Compete: A Coach's Playbook for a Winning Team

Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department
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For additional copies or information, call the
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at 612-348-5618.

Notice

This manual is not intended as an endorsement or criticism of any product; it is simply intended to point out the nutritional value of foods. The content is intended for informational purposes only and not for use as an alternative to personalized healthcare.

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how to help your athletes gain that extra edge? Perhaps you've tried a new drill to improve reaction time or increase strength. In addition to innovative coaching techniques, one of the fastest ways to improve performance is by promoting healthy eating.

Eating right helps young athletes maintain high energy levels, prevent fatigue and injury, and accelerate healing if injury occurs.

You have the power to influence your athletes' eating habits. While you aren't there to monitor what your athletes eat at home, you do have control over their eating habits in the gym, on the field or the arena.

This playbook provides the basics of good sports nutrition. It also gives ideas on:

- Setting guidelines and rules for what athletes eat at practices or games
- Being a great role model for athletes by also practicing healthy eating habits
- Advocating for healthy changes in the athletic environment
- Providing sports nutrition information to athletes and parents (see handouts in back)

This season, consider good nutrition an essential piece of equipment for success.

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“To succeed...you need to find something to hold on to, something to motivate you, something to inspire you.”

-tony dorsett, nfl running back

Making the Call: Setting Nutrition Guidelines

As a coach, you have the power to influence your athletes' eating habits. Setting a few rules about what can and can't be eaten at practice or events will go a long way toward encouraging healthier eating behaviors and giving your athletes that extra edge. Consider setting the following guidelines for your team:

- Soda pop is not allowed at practices or games. Pop slows down the body's absorption of water and can cause cramping or stomach discomfort.
- Athletes cannot eat candy at practices or games. Candy and other foods high in simple sugars cause rapid swings in blood sugar levels and can trigger sudden fatigue.
- Water breaks are permitted and encouraged during practices and events. Remind athletes to bring water or arrange for parents to bring water for the team.
- Nutritious foods after practice and competition are an important source of refueling for athletes. Provide athletes and parents with a list of healthy snacks (see parent handouts in back).

Last but not least, encourage your athletes to eat smart and healthy every day! Set an example by following these guidelines yourself.

“First, master the fundamentals.”

-Larry bird, nba coach

Home Court Advantage: Healthy Sports Nutrition Environment

Just like other behaviors, what people choose to eat is influenced by their beliefs, environment and the actions of others. Advocating for a healthier nutrition environment will go a long way in helping your athletes choose a well-balanced diet. As a coach, take the responsibility to talk to your organization’s board of directors, athletic director, park board director or school principal to ensure athletes have an opportunity to eat healthfully. Advocate that:

- Healthy snacks such as fruit, fruit juices, crackers, peanuts and granola bars will be available at the concession stand. Granola bars that do not have sugar listed as one of the first two ingredients are recommended.
- Vending machines at practice and game facilities will include a variety of healthy foods and beverages.
- Foods low in nutritional value (e.g., candy, soda pop and french fries), and coupons for these foods, will not be used as rewards for young athletes.
- Team parties, banquets and events will include a variety of healthy foods and beverages.
- Fund-raising efforts will support healthy eating and will not include the sale of foods that are high in fat or added sugars. Examples of healthy fund-raising items include popcorn, fruit and non-food items.

If you use the same community facilities as other teams, work together with their coaches to advocate for the sale of healthier foods and beverages at practices or events.

Sample Letter for Parents

The following letter can be sent to parents prior to the start of the season. Please modify it to fit your needs and the age of your athletes. A copy of this letter can be found in the back pocket of this book.

(Date)

(Address)

Dear parent/guardian,

The start of our new season is just around the corner! The coaching staff of the (team name) is very excited. As coach, I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss our team's preparation for practices and competitions.

Having the right equipment, uniforms and skills to play the game goes a long way toward ensuring a successful season. This year, I'd like you to think about good nutrition as an essential piece of equipment.

Eating healthy food and staying hydrated will accomplish three big jobs:

- Keep athletes healthy (and, if injury occurs, helping them heal as quickly as possible)
- Delay or prevent fatigue
- Maintain high energy levels

Pack your child's game bag with healthy snacks to eat during practices and games, or to share with teammates afterward. Good examples are fresh fruits like orange wedges, watermelon, bananas, grapes or raisins; whole-grain cereals or cereal bars; trail mix with nuts; and crackers or bagels.

To avoid dehydration, athletes should drink plenty of water before, during and after practices or games. Diluted fruit juices and sports drinks are also acceptable, but water is preferred. *Pop will not be allowed at practices or competitions.* Sugar content slows down the body's absorption of water. Also, beware of caffeinated sports drinks, which increase the risk of dehydration.

The other coaches and I plan to follow these tips to encourage good sports nutrition. Thanks for helping our athletes have a successful and healthy season.

Sincerely,

Coach (Name)

Sample Letter for Athletes

The following letter can be given to athletes at the beginning of the season. Please modify it to fit your needs. A copy of this letter can be found in the back pocket of this book.

(Date)

(Address)

Dear athlete,

I hope you are as excited as I am about the coming season! We have a great team this year, and I'm expecting a great performance from all my athletes.

Now is a good time to think about how we will prepare for a winning season. You will have to practice hard to build up your body. This year, I also want you to eat healthy foods as part of your training for practices and competitions. Bring healthy snacks to school, practices and games. Snacks such as fruits, bagels, trail mix and cereal bars are all good examples. I also want you to get into the habit of eating healthy meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Pop will not be allowed at practices or competitions. You can drink water, fruit juice or sports drinks. Water is the best way to fill your body before, during and after practices or games.

Eating the right food and drinking water will give our team an extra edge over our competition. I plan to follow these rules and I believe you can, too!

Let's have a fun and successful season!

Sincerely,

Coach (Name)

*“The will to win is important,
but the will to prepare is vital.”*
-joe paterno, penn state football coach

Food Guide Pyramid

A healthy diet is necessary for athletes to perform at optimal levels and avoid injury. All young athletes need to include a variety of nutritious foods in their diets. The Food Guide Pyramid is an excellent resource because it:

- Incorporates a variety of nutritious foods
- Emphasizes high-carbohydrate foods like breads, cereals, pastas and vegetables needed to build energy stores
- Guides the selection of a lower-fat diet
- Offers a variety of foods within each food group so meals can be built around foods young people like

Because of rapid growth and development, and high levels of physical activity, teen athletes should eat the higher number of recommended servings from each food group. This is especially true for the bread, cereal, rice and pasta group, and the fruit and vegetable groups.

Food Guide Pyramid

A Guide to Daily Food Choices

FATS, OILS, AND SWEETS
use sparingly

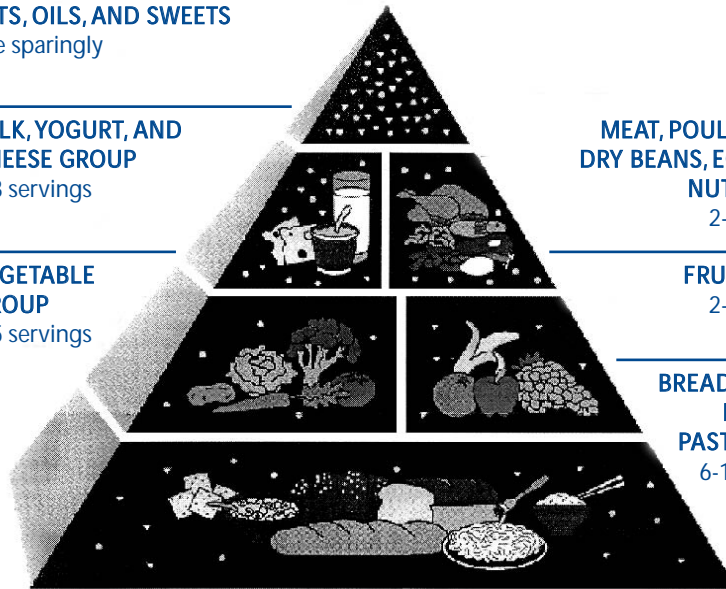
MILK, YOGURT, AND CHEESE GROUP
2-3 servings

VEGETABLE GROUP
3-5 servings

MEAT, POULTRY, FISH, DRY BEANS, EGGS, AND NUTS GROUP
2-3 servings

FRUIT GROUP
2-4 servings

BREAD, CEREAL, RICE, AND PASTA GROUP
6-11 servings



Each of these food groups provides some but not all of the essential nutrients athletes need. The whole Team of foods is needed for maximum energy and top performance.

SAMPLE MENU

Meal	Menu	Meal	Menu
Breakfast	pancakes with mixed berries milk	Snack <i>(before practice)</i>	water granola bar
Snack	bagel with peanut butter orange juice	Snack <i>(after practice)</i>	raisins crackers fruit juice
Lunch	cheese pizza carrots and celery sticks graham crackers milk	Dinner	roasted chicken breast and rice green beans bread small salad milk

Power Breakfast

Skipping breakfast is the biggest nutritional mistake athletes make. Breakfast doesn't require a lot of time to prepare. Here are some quick and nutritious breakfast ideas:

- Yogurt with cereal
- Bagel with low-fat cream cheese
- Fruit smoothies or instant breakfast
- Raisins and peanuts
- Bran muffin
- Graham crackers with peanut butter
- Pita bread with cheese

In addition to the above suggestions, cereal is – and should be – a regular part of breakfast for many people. When recommending a cereal, suggest varieties that are high in fiber, iron and calcium, and low in added sugar or fat (e.g., Product 19, Total and Complete). These enriched cereals will provide a healthy start to the day.

High Five to Fruits and Vegetables

Eating fruits and vegetables should be a routine part of an athlete's diet. Five or more servings a day help athletes stay healthy while they compete. Fruits and vegetables are a great way to add valuable nutrients and fluids back to an athlete's body after a tough day of competition. Encourage your athletes to eat their favorites:

Best fruit choices

Orange
Grapefruit
Nectarine
Banana
Strawberries
Pineapple
Cantaloupe
Tangerine
Blueberries
Mango
Apricot
Kiwi

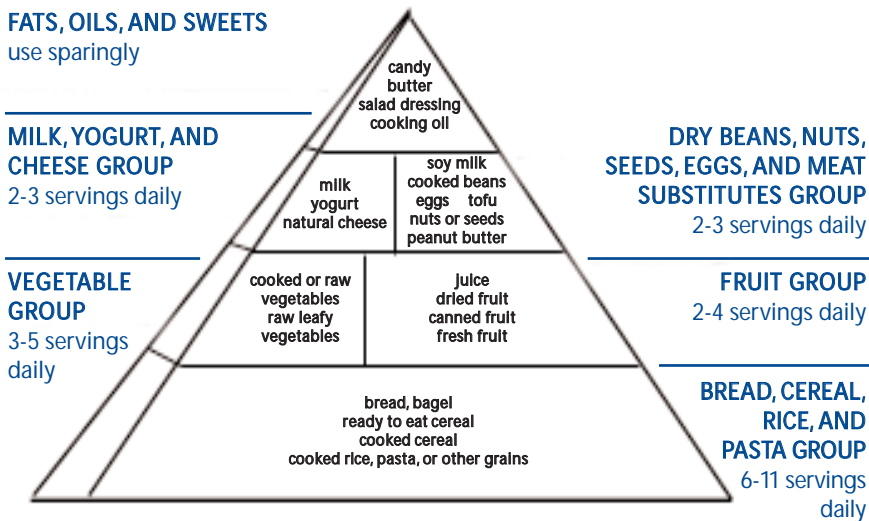
Best vegetable choices

Broccoli
Green pepper
Cabbage
Cauliflower
Tomatoes and tomato sauce
Carrots
Romaine lettuce
Asparagus
Spinach
Sweet potatoes
Baked white potatoes
Winter squash

Food Power for Vegetarian Athletes

Athletes do not necessarily need foods of animal origin to reach their full potential. Many elite athletes choose a vegetarian diet. Careful meal planning is important to obtain all the essential nutrients needed for growth and activity. A vegetarian diet that is well-balanced emphasizes whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes. Youth need to pay special attention to meeting their energy, protein, calcium and iron needs. The Vegetarian Food Guide Pyramid is an excellent resource in helping young athletes select the foods necessary to fuel them through training sessions and competition.

The Traditional Healthy Vegetarian Diet Pyramid



*“If you don’t do what’s best for your body,
you’re the one who comes up on the short end.”*
-julius erving, former nba player

Win With Water

- Water, an essential nutrient in any diet, carries nutrients to cells while taking away waste material. When athletes sweat, they lose water.
- Hydrated athletes perform better and feel less fatigued. When the game is on the line, well-hydrated athletes are less prone to injury and have energy to finish strong.
- Children are especially prone to overheating. They sweat less, get hotter during exercise and do not handle extreme temperatures as well as adults.¹
- Water is usually adequate, although athletes may drink more fluids if they are flavored (e.g., sports drinks and diluted fruit juice).
- Several factors cause athletes to dehydrate more quickly:
 - ✓ Hot temperatures and high humidity
 - ✓ High intensity or long workouts
 - ✓ Windy conditions

The Scoop on Sports Drinks

- Water is best for competitions up to 90 minutes with breaks in activity or 60 minutes of continuous activity.
- Sports drinks with small amounts of sugar and sodium, and moderate amounts of carbohydrates (not above 8%) help rehydrate the body more quickly than water when competing for more than 90 minutes. Examples include Gatorade, Powerade and Allsport.
- Caffeinated sports drinks can promote dehydration and should be avoided. Although this is not an exhaustive list, Prolyte Energy Drinks, Extreme Ripped Force and Red Bull are examples of sports drinks with a significant amount of caffeine.

What Can Coaches Do?

- Drink plenty of fluids at your games and practices. Be a role model!
- Emphasize the importance of drinking water before, during and after competitions. Instruct athletes to drink 8 to 16 ounces of water one hour before competition to prevent dehydration.
- Provide water or arrange to have athletes or parents bring water to practices and games.
- Require frequent water breaks. Athletes should drink moderate amounts (4 to 8 ounces) of cool water about every 15 minutes during competition and at practices.
- Provide personalized water bottles. On hot or humid days, tell athletes to get water when they need it rather than wait for a water break.
- Prohibit pop during practices and games. High concentrations of sugar and carbonation decrease water absorption, and can cause cramping and stomach discomfort.

*“Some people dream of success
while others wake up and achieve it.”*
-unknown

Game-day Grub

BEFORE THE GAME

A pre-event meal will provide athletes with the necessary energy to participate at their highest level. Pre-event meals should be high in carbohydrates, low-to-moderate in protein and low in fat. Athletes should eat foods two-to-three hours before competition to avoid cramps or stomach discomfort. They should also stick to foods that are familiar to them.

AFTER THE GAME

Post-game nutrition is critical for athletes. The first three-to-four hours after competition are especially important. During this time the body is most efficient at replenishing energy stores. Encourage athletes to refuel with a healthy snack or meal after practices or games.

ALL-DAY EVENTS

At all-day events, it is often difficult to avoid eating within one hour of performance. Encourage athletes to eat several mini-meals over the course of the day. Meals should be small and low in sugar and fat. Foods and beverages available at the concession stand are often poor choices for athletes. Plan ahead and encourage athletes to bring healthy foods and beverages to events.

Ideas for Good Game-day Grub

Dried, fresh, canned or frozen fruit low in fiber

(plums, melons, cherries, peaches)

Breads, bagels, breadsticks

100% fruit or vegetable juice

Lean meat, low-fat cheese

Yogurt

Cottage cheese (low fat)

Baked potato

Cereal with low-fat milk (skim or 1%)

Pasta

Rice with vegetables or meat

Tortillas with beans, rice, vegetables or lean meats

Cheese and crackers

Gorp (peanuts, raisins, cereal and sunflower seeds)

Bananas with peanut butter

Broiled English muffin with pizza sauce and cheese

Things to Avoid

Candy, sugar

Soda pop, tea, coffee, caffeine

Fried foods (They digest slowly and sit in the stomach)

Large meals

High-fat meats (e.g., hot dogs and bologna)

Healthy Choices on the Run

Your team is on the go, and the only way to have a quick meal is to stop at a fast-food restaurant. If this sounds familiar, try the following tips for healthier fast-food meals.

- Choose a sub shop where athletes can choose what goes on their sandwich
- Suggest a grilled chicken sandwich rather than a fried chicken patty
- Choose a side salad rather than french fries or onion rings
- Top baked potatoes with salsa or BBQ sauce instead of butter
- Recommend two plain hamburgers over one super deluxe burger
- Choose pancakes, low-fat muffins, toast, cereal, fruit or juices for breakfast. These items are all higher in carbohydrates and lower in fat than an egg and meat breakfast.
- Suggest thick crust pizzas with low-fat toppings such as pineapple, veggies or Canadian bacon. Avoid high-fat ingredients such as pepperoni, sausage, extra cheese and olives.
- Decide on sandwiches with lower-fat meats, such as turkey or chicken. A majority of fat in sandwiches is found in the “special sauce.” Have your sandwich prepared without “special sauces,” mayonnaise, dressings or spreads.
- Select juices or low-fat milk as beverages with meals. Even shakes made with low-fat milk are more nutritious than soda pop.

If you aren't sure about the nutritional value of food at a fast food restaurant, ask restaurant staff for the nutrient analysis.

*“You have to expect things of yourself
before you can do them.”*
-michael jordan, nba player

Nutrition Misconceptions

Nutrition misconceptions come from many sources and athletes are bombarded with promises of bigger muscles, less fat and more energy. Coaches, parents and athletes should know the facts.

Misconception #1:

Carbohydrates make you fat.

Fact:

Carbohydrates are not fattening. They are the most important nutrient in an athlete’s diet. The body needs carbohydrates for energy. Muscles use carbohydrates when an athlete competes or practices. Excess calories of any kind, whether they are fat, carbohydrates or protein, increase weight.²

Misconception #2:

Eating more protein or protein powders builds muscles.

Fact:

Although it is an important part of the diet, eating excess protein will not increase muscle growth—muscles grow through exercise. Excess protein, like excess fat, gets stored as fat.³ Protein supplements do not contain any more protein than a serving of meat,⁴ chicken or fish.

✓ Play 9:

Nutrition and Supplement Misconceptions

Misconception #3:

Low-fat foods are low in calories.

Fact:

Many low-fat foods have added sugar, making the food higher in calories. Be sure to read food labels.

Misconception #4:

Eating sugar (as contained in pop or candy bars) immediately before a competition will increase athletic performance by boosting energy.⁵

Fact:

Eating sugars before competition may actually impair athletic performance. Sweets can cause rapid energy swings, which result in low blood sugar and less energy.

Supplement Misconceptions

Athletes use supplements with the hope of increasing athletic ability and endurance. However, supplements can be dangerous. Coaches, athletes and parents should be well-informed before considering their use.

Misconception #1:

Salt tablets are needed to replace sodium lost through sweating.

Fact:

Salt tablets should never be used. An athlete's priority should be to replace fluids, not salt. Salt tablets can increase heat disorders and decrease performance.⁶

Misconception #2:

Vitamins will provide energy needed to perform better, even if the diet is not great.

Fact:

Vitamins do not provide energy. Taking vitamins does not eliminate the need for a balanced diet. There are many nutrients such as protein and fiber that cannot be obtained from a vitamin supplement.

Misconception #3:

Sports and energy bars enhance performance.

Fact:

Many sports and energy bars claim to provide energy needed for great performance. However, a healthy, balanced diet is the best way to have optimal performance. Many sports bars lack fiber, are high in calories and are expensive. Regular cereal bars provide as much nutrition at a much lower cost.⁷

Misconception #4:

Creatine supplements boost athletic performance.

Fact:

There is no proof that taking creatine enhances athletic performance. Creatine supplements have been shown to cause cramps,⁸ muscle strains and diarrhea. The body makes a sufficient amount of creatine on its own.⁹ In fact, excess creatine is excreted in urine.¹⁰

A Summary of Do's and Don'ts

An athlete's food choices affect performance during practice and competition. In crunch time, these are key points to remember:

- Encourage athletes to follow the Food Guide Pyramid.
Eating healthy every day will keep athletes performing at their highest levels
- Set healthy nutrition guidelines for your team
- Role model your own healthy eating habits. You are an important adult figure in athletes' lives
- Provide plenty of water at games and practices—take frequent team water breaks
- Prohibit soda pop at games and practices
- Encourage athletes to build their diet around foods that are high in carbohydrates, low-to-moderate in protein and low in fat (see handout for examples)
- Ask athletes to avoid candy, fried foods and high-fat meats before games
- Remind athletes to eat foods that are familiar to them before competitions
- Share the nutrition and supplement myths and facts with athletes

Coach's Resources

Web sites

- www.kidshhealth.org – Nemours Foundation
- www.acsm.org – American College of Sports Medicine
- www.webmd.com – Web MD
- www.eatright.org – American Dietetic Association
- www.gssiweb.com – Gatorade Sports Science Institute

- www.aces.uiuc.edu/~food-lab/sports_nutrition – University of Illinois at Urbana – College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Books

Clark, Nancy, M.S. R.D. (1990). *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, and Updated, Expanded Second Edition: *Eating to Fuel Your Active Lifestyle*. Brookline, M.A. Sports Medicine Brookline.

Duyff, Roberta Larson, M.S. R.D. C.F.C.S. (1998). *The American Dietetic Association's Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*. Minneapolis, MN, Chronimed Publishing.

Jennings, Debbi Sowell, M.S. R.D. (1995). *Play Hard, Eat Right: A Parent's Guide to Sports Nutrition for Children*. American Dietetic Association.

These books are available at Barnes and Noble.

Endnotes

¹Jennings, Debbi Sowell, M.S., R.D. and Suzanne Nelson Steen, D.Sc., R.D. *Play Hard, Eat Right: A Parent's Guide to Sports Nutrition for Children*. The American Dietetic Association, 1995.

²usfoodservice.com/publications/archive/Healthnext_winter01/article1.html

³*Food Power: A Coach's Guide to Improving Performance*, 2nd Edition. National Dairy Council, 1991.

⁴Jennings, Debbi Sowell, M.S., R.D. (see above).

⁵Food Power: A Coach's Guide to Improving Performance. (see above).

⁶Jennings, Debbi Sowell, M.S., R.D. (see above).

⁷www.cyberdiet.com.

⁸Clark, Nancy, M.S., R.D. American College of Sports Medicine Annual Meeting, May 31 – June 3, 2000. *SCAN's PULSE*, Fall 2000.

⁹Duyff, Roberta Larson, M.S., R.D., C.F.C.S. *The American Dietetic Association's Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*. The American Dietetic Association, 1998.

¹⁰Clark, Nancy, M.S., R.D. (see above).



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