

Game Plan for Navigating the Food Environment

On game nights or day-long tournaments, it can be easier to choose convenient over healthy. Use these tips to select the best fuel for your athlete. Plan ahead and pack healthy foods and beverages for the whole team.

Start by making your 'home team' strong

1. Get smart about healthy foods, snacks, and beverages for youth athletes.
2. Recognize the risks. Kids who play sports are more likely to eat and drink some things that are unhealthy --like fast food-- and sugar sweetened beverages --like soda pop and sports drinks.
3. Start healthy, stay healthy. Letting kids eat unhealthy foods because they are not overweight right now is still unhealthy, and what they learn now will stick with them as they get older.
4. Have a healthy breakfast every day.
5. Choose healthy alternatives. Recognize that food brought for athletes should be considered snacks and *not* treats. Find ways to celebrate and motivate players other than with unhealthy food or snacks. Consider t-shirts, trophies, or healthy snacks such as mini sandwiches made with lean meat and veggies and low-fat milk!
6. Plan ahead! During full day sport events, bring healthy snacks from home instead of relying on foods from concessions or fast food options. See snack list for ideas.
7. Stay consistent on game days. Avoid unhealthy foods from concessions or fast food despite the fact your child eats "healthier" during the week. Ask yourself: If my child does not consume cookies, candy and soda at home why should they do it on game day?
8. Do it together. Commit to eating meals as a family, and involve your child in preparing the meal! Make grocery shopping and meal preparation family events. Let them help you pick out healthy foods for snacks.

Help your team and leagues support healthy eating

1. Be a leader. Organized post-game team snacks are common, especially for younger athletes. Talk to coaches and other parents and commit to bringing healthy snacks or no snacks at all.
2. Get the coach on your team. Encourage coaches to talk to players about healthy eating. Kids often will listen if they hear these messages from coaches or older athletes.
3. Get your league on-board. Support your youth sport organization and coaches mission by promoting physical activity and healthy nutrition. If your organization hosts games/tournaments, encourage them to sell healthy foods and beverages at concession stands and alternative ways to raise money on non-food items, such as t-shirts. Volunteer to help your organization provide healthy food for kids.

Concessions

- Speak up. Ask your concession managers for fruit, water, hummus and other items they do not sell. Other families may want the same items.
- Bring foods from home to supplement foods from the concession stand to make a complete meal! For example, sandwiches from home can be paired with baked chips, an apple and water from the concession stand.
- Select fruits and vegetables when available
- Water and low-fat milk are your best drink options
- Nuts, trail mix, granola bars, and bagels are good options
- Select baked chips over regular chips
- Avoid nachos, hot dogs, pizza

- Avoid items high in calories and low in nutrients, such as soda, candy and cookies. Even diet soda pop is not a good choice because the caffeine and artificial sweeteners can be dehydrating.
- Avoid using concession food as a reward for a game well played

Eating Out – healthy options for your athlete and you

- Select a sandwich shop where you can have lean meats and lots of veggies. Stay away from heavy dressings and mayo.
- Begin your meal with a salad bar – go light on the dressing! – and share an entrée
- Choose baked, steamed, or broiled entrées
- Go for a side of veggies, fruit, or wild rice instead of French fries
- Ask if you can get healthy substitutes, like whole wheat bread for sandwiches, or brown rice instead of white rice
- Water or low-fat milk to drink, no soda
- Avoid entrées with heavy, cream sauces
- Desserts are not needed
- See buffet – stay away!
- Leave food on the plate; portion sizes at most restaurants have far more food than you need – sharing, getting ½ orders or getting a to-go box is ok

Eating a lot of **fast food** you will get ...

Too much:

- Calories
- Fat
- Sugar-sweetened beverages
- Added sugars

Not enough:

- Fiber
- Milk
- Fruits and vegetables

Young athletes need a healthy balanced diet. Feed your athlete's body what it needs!