

## Helping Kids in Youth Sports Eat Better

A well-balanced and nutritious diet is important for young athletes. It supports growing bodies, keeps them healthy, and gives them the fuel to perform their best. Eating healthfully now sets the stage for healthy food intake as young adults and adults. For young athletes, it is especially important to get the right amount, and the right kinds, of foods.

Unfortunately, many young athletes do not eat healthy diets. Like many Americans, they eat diets that lead to the development of heart disease and overweight. Could your young athlete's diet use a tune up?

Does your child:

- Rush to practice and grab fast food on the way?
- Receive "treats" from well-meaning parents and coaches after games?
- Have to choose food from a concession stand filled with candy, chips and hotdogs at sports events?

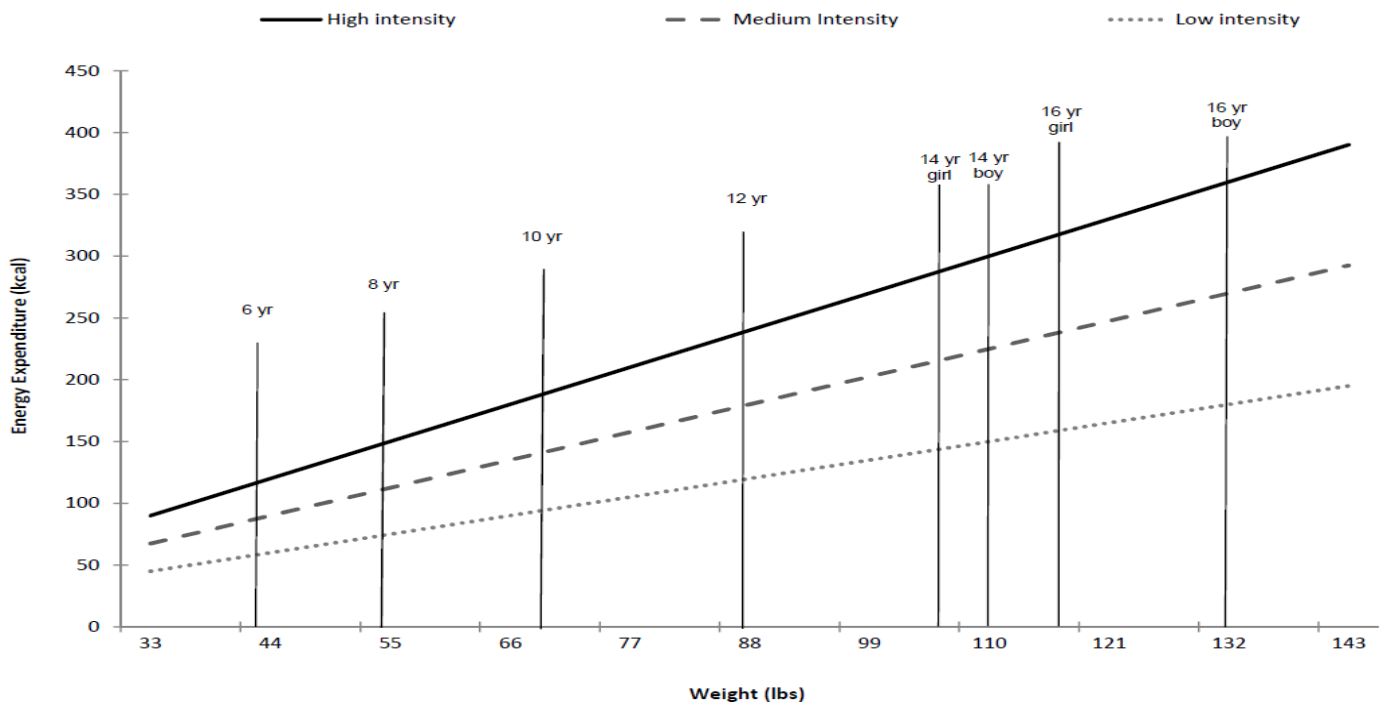
If you answered "yes" to any of these, or if you're just confused about what a young athlete should eat, this handout offers some basic guidelines. We've drawn from the best available science, with an understanding of what really happens with kids in sports, and with input from parents who face the realities of feeding their young athletes every day.

### How much do kids in sports need to eat?

Kids who play sports are more physically active than those who do not, but surprisingly, they are just as likely to be overweight. In fact, kids who play sports tend to eat more fast food and drink more sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda pop and sports drinks). Kids in sports, just like all kids, are becoming more overweight. Just being in sports is not enough to keep kids healthy. Kids do not burn as much energy while they are playing sports as you might think, so their calorie needs are often not much different from other kids'. While everyone's needs are different, the USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend the following for *moderately active* adolescents:

	Female	Male
9-13 years	1600-2000 calories/day	1800-2200 calories/day
14-18 years	2000 calories/day	2400-2800 calories/day

While younger kids, 9-13 years old, appear to have seemingly endless amounts of energy they tend to burn very few calories during sport. Older kids, 14-18 years old, burn more calories during sport and care must be taken to assure they are getting enough healthy calories to support their activity level, especially endurance athletes.



Here's how young athletes' calorie needs stack up. The graph above shows how many calories a typical kid burns during a sports practice at high, medium, and low intensity exercise. The more a kid weighs, the more calories burned. For example, a low intensity activity such as walking or golfing, burns fewer calories than a medium intensity activity such as riding a bicycle, playing softball or baseball, and a high intensity activity such as running, swimming, dancing, basketball, soccer or football. A 10 year old might burn 75 calories walking for an hour versus about 175 calories playing soccer. While 100 calories may not sound like a big difference, it's equal to 8 ounces of soda. That's less than a can!

### Bottom line:

**Young athletes need a healthy balanced diet. Low nutrient, high calorie treats for a great game or practice can easily tip the balance toward overeating. Feed your athlete's body what it needs!**