

A guide for young athletes to play their best

Playing sports sometimes makes it hard to eat the right foods. As a young athlete, be sure to get the right amount, and the right kinds, of food. Eating healthy supports growing bodies, keeps you healthy, and gives you fuel to perform your best. Kids who play sports tend to eat more fast food and drink more sugar-sweetened beverages (like soda pop and sports drinks), which provide extra sugar, salt and calories you don't need. Kids and parents need help finding a way to eat and perform their best. Here's how to do it!

How much energy (calories) do I need?

Kids who play sports are more physically active than those who do not, but surprisingly they are just as likely to be overweight. Just being in sports is not enough to keep kids healthy— you have to balance how much you eat with how much activity you get. The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommends 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

What do I eat?

With a busy schedule between school and practices it can be hard to eat healthy and easier to grab a fast food burger, which is less healthy. Plan ahead on game days and on evenings when practice happens during dinner. Here are some simple guidelines to follow:

Plan to eat 3 healthy meals a day, plus healthy snacks - If you have practice over dinnertime be sure to grab an afternoon snack like a sandwich, fruit and water. Eat a fruit or vegetable for every meal and snack.

Eat whole grains - Look for whole grain breads, pastas and crackers, brown rice, and oatmeal. Stay away from processed chips, candy and fast food, like pizza and French fries that will weigh you down.

Eat lean proteins - Eat poultry, pork, fish and beans as the main protein sources. Red meat is a good source, too, but try to choose lean cuts and limit to twice a week!

Eat healthy fats - Healthy fats are in olive and canola oils, baked fish, guacamole, peanut butter, nuts and seeds. Limit butter, whole milk, red meat & most fast food. Go easy on cheese!

Eat fruits and non-fried vegetables - Select fruits and vegetables that are in season and go for bright or deep colors. Choose a variety and get creative!

Stay hydrated with H₂O - As an athlete you should never be thirsty! Drink plain, unflavored water before, during and after your event.

Get enough vitamins and minerals - Aim for getting vitamins and minerals through foods! Many athletes struggle to get enough calcium and iron in their diets, especially females and endurance athletes. **Calcium** best sources: low-fat dairy products, dark leafy green vegetables and beans. **Iron** best sources: dried beans, meat, iron-fortified cereals and whole grains.

Sports and Energy Drinks

Sports drinks may help if you exercise hard continuously for more than 1 hour. They can replace lost fluid and replenish energy stores. But water should be your **first** choice before sports drinks. What you can get from a sports drink should come from a healthy, balanced diet first. Most kids don't need the extra sugar, salt and calories in sports drinks. Avoid energy drinks!

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