

What to Eat Before a Game

By Stewart Flaherty

The fuel you put in your body will have a huge impact on your physical performance during a soccer game. Proper diet and hydration will have a direct effect on how far you can run, and how long you can play without fatigue. The repeated sprints and runs required during a game of soccer place a high demand on the glycogen stores of the body. This places a high importance on a carbohydrate rich diet.

Timing

The fuelling process should begin 2 to 3 days before a game and continue on an ongoing basis. Players should hydrate on a consistent basis with at least 1.5 to 2 liters per day. Players should also consume sports drink up to, during and after a game.

On game day players should consume a meal rich in Carbohydrate 2.5 to 3 hours before kickoff. Eating too soon before the game will not allow the body sufficient time to digest the food and use the carbohydrate provided to optimal effect. Players should also eat a meal rich in carbohydrate immediately after a game. Protein and carbohydrate consumed after a game will help the body's recovery process and repair muscles after strenuous competition.

Hydration

Hydration is a crucial element of soccer nutrition and also good health, for both adults and youth players alike. The University of Connecticut produced research on hydration in youth soccer players. The study examined youth soccer players during a soccer camp. Between 50 and 75% of the players were reported as "significantly" dehydrated. Drinking flavored water or sports drink can help if young players find water bland. The UConn research found children voluntarily drank 44.5% more water when it was flavored. In 2005 The American College of Sports Medicine produced a report on hydration in sports. It was found that even a 1 to 2% reduction in body mass through perspiration can decrease aerobic performance.

Food Type

The glycogen stores of the body play a large part in your physical capacity standing up throughout a game. Healthy foods rich in carbohydrate will optimize your glycogen stores and allow you to make end to end runs during the second half and later stages of a game. Good foods to eat for carbohydrate are;

- Whole grain pasta
- Whole grain bread
- Brown rice
- Baked potato

- Rice pudding (dessert)

Protein is also an important element of a soccer player's diet. Protein will develop muscles and increase the recovery and repair process of the body following competition. Good sources of protein include;

- Chicken
- Lean red meat
- Fish
- Beans

Avoid

High fat processed foods have little value to the body when it comes to converting food to energy. Soccer players should steer clear of high fat foods and candy, especially during the season. Not only does eating a healthy diet increase your soccer performance, it improves your overall health and will help you lead a longer life over years.

You should also avoid soda and juices high in sugar. Natural fruit juice is fine but brands containing high sugar levels will hinder performance not help it. Soda can also have a dehydrating effect on the body, putting you in a bad position before the game even starts with regards to hydration.

If you enjoy your favorite sweets, try limiting it to one time per week and not before a game, maybe as a reward the night after a game.

Half Time

If you eat at half time or close to a game you must keep the food light and high in nutritional value. Soccer teams often eat oranges at half time. Other foods that can provide quick energy are grapes, raisins or jelly beans.

ACTION PLAN

- Plan your meals on game day in advance.
- Eat a meal high in carbohydrate 2.5 to 3 hours before game time.
- Eat a meal high in carbohydrate and protein immediately after a game.
- Drink 1.5 to 2 liters per day of water.
- Consume water or sports drink before, during and after a game.
- Avoid processed foods, or foods high in sugar and fat.
- Avoid drinking soda or highly caffeinated beverages.