Youth Sports Healthy Eating Playbook



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The Playbook

This guide identifies recommended food and drink options to support healthy, active lifestyles for youth athletes ages 5-17.

The playbook features:

- **The importance of fueling and hydrating**
- **Pre-game post-game snack options**
- **Price comparison of healthy vs. typical snack options**



FUEL

Carbohydrates are organic compounds made up of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen and serve as the primary energy source for children. You can find several types of carbohydrates in a variety of foods. One type of carbohydrates are simple carbs which digest quickly and are good for immediate energy boosts before or after an activity and work great as a snack. Another type of carbohydrates are complex carbohydrates which take longer to digest and provide long-lasting energy for athletes and are a great choice for meals.

Proteins are large, complex, molecules made of amino acids that perform roles in the body such as structure, function, and regulation of body cells, tissues, and organs. Protein should make up to 15-20% of total calories each day.

Fats are needed for energy and absorbing certain nutrients despite their negative reputation. While carbohydrates are the body's main source of fuel, healthy fats help fuel the body during rest and lower-intensity activities. Choose unsaturated fats for your child like avocados, nuts, olive oil, and fatty fish while limiting high saturated fats found in fried food and highly processed snacks.

Healthy eating is about balance, not perfection. Aim to choose nutrient-rich snacks most of the time while allowing favorite treats occasionally. Small swaps can make a big difference over time and parents can follow an "80/20 approach":

- **Most snacks should include a fruit, whole grain, dairy, or protein.**
- **Chips or similar snack foods can still be offered occasionally but paired with a more nutritious item when possible (e.g., a small bag of baked chips with an apple or cheese stick).**

Carbohydrates	Protein	Healthy Fats
• Oatmeal • Rice • Fruit • Pasta • Whole grain bread	• Chicken • Turkey • Eggs • Greek yogurt • Beans	• Avocado • Nuts • Peanut butter • Olive oil • Hummus

Example meals:

- **Turkey sandwich + apple + milk**
- **Oatmeal + peanut butter + banana**
- **Eggs + whole-grain toast + strawberries**
- **Chicken + rice + sweet potato**



Eating Well

Eating well does not have to be complicated! Eating a variety of foods not only keeps our meals interesting and flavorful, but it is also the key to a healthy and balanced diet. Each food has a unique mix of nutrients that supports our body function.

IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF A PERFORMANCE PLATE

To succeed in building an energy-packed, nutritious meal, try to include all five of the following components:

1. **Whole grains or energy-enhancing foods: 100 percent whole-wheat bread, bagels, tortillas, pita bread and crackers; brown rice; whole-grain pasta; beans; potatoes; oatmeal; whole-grain breakfast cereals; yogurt.**

2. **Lean proteins or recovery/muscle-building foods: Grilled/baked/broiled/roasted chicken, fish, pork loin, turkey, sirloin and lean ground beef; eggs; low-fat cheese; tofu.**

3. **Fruits and vegetables or antioxidant-rich foods: Apples; oranges; bananas; blueberries; grapes; melon; strawberries; broccoli; green beans; spinach; romaine lettuce; carrots; cauliflower; mushrooms; cucumbers; tomatoes.**

4. **Fat or immunity/flavor-boosting foods: Salmon; tuna; nuts; seeds; olives; olive oil; canola oil; avocado; nut butters; oil-based salad dressings.**

5. **Fluid or hydration-promoting beverages: Water; low-fat milk (cow, almond, soy, etc.); 100 percent fruit juice**

HYDRATE

A child's daily hydration needs will vary based on age, sex, weight, physical activity, and other factors like climate. On average, kids need to drink the following total amounts of fluids per day to avoid dehydration:

- **5-8 year olds need to drink about 40 fluid ounces per day (5 cups)**
- **9-13 year olds need to drink about 54-61 fluid ounces per day (~6 ¾ – 7 ½ cups)**
- **14-18 year olds need to drink about 61-88 fluid ounces per day (~7 ½ – 11 cups)**

*** There are a variety of ways a child can meet their daily hydration needs. Hydration can be achieved 100% from water intake alone, however, milk and juice can be included. ***

Signs of dehydration

- **Little to no tears when crying**
- **Fontanelle spots (areas on the head that look soft and indented)**
- **Irritability**
- **Frequent headaches**
- **Urine that is dark yellow or brown**

HYDRATE OPTIONS

Hydration	Activity Less Than or Equal to 1Hour	Activity More Than 1-Hour
Pre-Game	• Water • Fruit-based smoothie	• Water • Sugar-free sports drink
Post-Game	• Water • Chocolate milk	• Water • Chocolate milk • Sugar-free sports drink

If you have trouble keeping your child hydrated, then these tips may help.

- **Have your child pick out a water bottle with their favorite color and/or design.**
- **Add appropriate flavoring to water such as fresh or frozen fruits and herbs.**
- **Set an example by drinking water throughout the day.**
- **Limit caffeinated drinks, sugary sports drinks, juices, and soft drinks as these can be dehydrating.**

REPEAT

Pre-Game and Post-Game Snack Options:

Snacks	Youth Baseball	Youth Softball	Youth Soccer	Youth Basketball	Youth Football
Pre-Game	• Apple slices • Trail mix • Mixed nuts	• Clementines • CLIF Bars • Beef/Turkey jerky	• Orange slices • Peanut butter crackers • Chex Mix	• Watermelon • Berries • No-bake energy bites	• Fruit cup • Granola bar • Plain or Greek yogurt
Post-Game	• String cheese • Grapes • Carrot sticks with hummus	• Rice Cake with nut butter and honey • Dried fruit • Turkey wrap	• Whole grain crackers and hummus • Apple sauce squeeze pouches • Fig bar	• Diced pineapple • KIND Bars • Mini deli sandwich	• Bananas • Pretzels • Tuna and crackers

Choose snacks that:

- **Contain whole grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy, or lean protein whenever possible**
- **Have less than 10 grams of added sugar per serving**
- **Provide at least 2-3 grams of protein (5 grams is even better)**
- **Provide at least 2 grams of fiber when appropriate**
- **Are low in saturated fat**
- **Are individually packaged or easy to portion safely**
- **Are shelf-stable when refrigeration is unavailable**

- **Include a variety of foods throughout the week rather than serving the same snack daily Whenever possible, include two food groups.**
    - **Whole grain + protein**
    - **Fruit + dairy**
    - **Fruit + nut/seed butter (if allergies allow)**
    - **Vegetables + hummus**
    - **Cheese + whole grain crackers**

Convenient Snack Alternatives

- **Cheetos → Simply Cheetos White Cheddar Puffs**
- **Doritos Nacho Cheese → Late July Organic Nacho Cheese Tortilla Chips**
- **Potato Chips → Baked potato chips**
- **Chocolate chip granola bars → Granola bars with little to no added sugar when possible**



PRICE COMPARISON

Price for a Team of 12:

Fresh Fruit: Apples/Oranges/Bananas - $3 to $5 a bag

15-Pack of Water Bottles - $3.48

Total: $8.48

Other Snack Prices:

Peanut Butter Crackers 10-Ct: $4.39

Nature Valley Granola Bar 12-Ct: $4.39

Watermelon Chunks: $4.49

CLIF Kid ZBar 6-Ct: $4.99

GoGo Squeez Yogurtz 10-Ct: $8.89

12-Pack of Chocolate Chip Cookies: $6.79

2-Pack of Capri Sun Drink Pouches: $6

Total: $12.79

Other Snack Prices:

Fudge Rounds 12-Ct: $4.99

Goldfish Crackers 12-Ct: $6.79

Gushers 12-Ct: $6.99

Apple Juice 12-Ct: $8.58

Chips Variety Pack: $8.99

Healthy snacks can often cost the same or less than highly processed snack foods when purchased in bulk or in season.

FUEL. HYDRATE. REPEAT.

Let's promote healthy, active lifestyles by educating and providing healthy snack options for ages 5-17 as part of obesity prevention.

Childhood Obesity

In the United States, nearly 1 in 5 children are affected by childhood obesity. Healthy eating and regular physical activity during childhood help support healthy growth, improve athletic performance, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life. Parents, coaches, and recreation programs all play an important role in creating healthy environments where children can thrive.

