

## **Nutrition for Soccer Players**

Soccer is an energy-intensive sport for which players need to be in excellent physical condition. It goes without saying that proper conditioning techniques are an integral part of coaches' and players' soccer training.

So too must be the knowledge of proper nutrition and hydration.

During the course of training and match play, it is common for players to run several miles, burning through calories and body fluids at prodigious rates. Good nutrition for soccer players involves good eating habits before, during and following training. In particular, players need to have adequate stores of carbohydrates and replenish lost fluids.

The following article, reprinted from Food for Footballers, is a good synthesis of the research and other articles we've found on nutrition for soccer players. Following the article are links to other readings on the subject.

(If your player has a unique health situation, we recommend consulting with the player's physician.)

### **Food for Footballers (soccer)**

Reprinted from Soccercoach1966.com

Sports nutrition, diet and food and drink for soccer players are becoming increasingly scientific and recognized for its importance in the game of soccer. Almost every professional soccer club has a nutritionist or similar expert advisor for their team. This article covers the most important principles of sport nutrition for amateur players and coaches.

#### **Why is sport nutrition or diet important in soccer?**

1. Food provides us with energy for our body including: muscles, brain and other organs. Soccer requires plenty of exercise, and therefore it is important to have energy available to us during training sessions or the game. The energy available to us at any particular time depends on our blood sugar levels.
2. If we over-eat, we become over-weight. The heavier we are, the more work our muscles have to do to take us the same distance. This reduces our stamina, and our ability to accelerate quickly. If we don't eat correctly, we can become weak and our overall health can decline, because we are not getting enough nutrients.
3. A healthy diet improves our general level of health, and can help us recover more quickly from injuries.
4. Along with a program of fitness training, our diet can help us develop stamina and improve athletic performance.
5. Diet is essential for our growth, and development.

## What to eat and when to eat it

The timing of the meals you eat is important. On the day of a match the intake of fat and protein should be restricted, as these nutrients require a relatively long time to digest. Plan to have your pre-match meal at least 3 hours before the match. Your pre-match meal should be: high in carbohydrate (this is the fuel that your body needs to perform at the highest level) low in fat, low in protein, not too bulky, and easy to digest. You should eat foods such as: breakfast cereal with low fat milk, toast or bread with jam/honey, sandwiches with banana/honey/jam, pasta/rice, energy bars, and orange juice.

Calorie intake according to UK Dept of health for Women is approx 1940 calories per day, for men it is around 2550, the figures below apply to adults with low activity levels

### Age Calories per day

	Boys-Girls
1-3-----	1,230 - 1,165
4-6-----	1,715 - 1,545
7-10-----	1,970 - 1,740
11-14-----	2,220 - 1,845
15-18-----	2,755 - 2,110
Adults-----	2,550 - 1,940

A snack high in carbohydrate may be eaten about 2 hours before a match; however, the time reference is only a guideline as there are great individual differences in the ability to digest food.

It is a good idea for you to experiment with a variation of foods at different times before training sessions. Food such as toast, bread or crumpets with jam/honey, sweetened cereal and low fat milk, orange juice and fruits such as bananas/grapes could be eaten.

During the cool down you should drink sports drinks and small snacks, such as bananas/grapes, Jaffa cakes/Jammy dodgers.

Once the game is over, fluids should be replaced and carbohydrates should be eaten as soon as possible, around 50grams of carbs should be eaten within approx 2 hour's after the game, which helps to promote recovery of glycogen stores, and you should aim to eat a meal, which is high in carbohydrates, such as pasta, spaghetti, rice, (curry with rice as long as the fat content is low) noodles, low fat pasta sauce, bread, potatoes and baked beans, beans on toast!

Carbohydrate rich foods must be the main source of calories in your diet. Table 1 lists foods, which contain a lot of carbohydrate. You should aim to eat the main bulk of your diet from complex carbs. Simple carbs should not be consumed in large quantities and are more useful as snacks between workouts, or to top up your energy intake. The carbs you eat should be balanced with a healthy intake of protein, low fat and plenty of fruit and vegetables, which are an excellent source of carbs.

**Table 1 Carbohydrate-rich food:**

<b>Complex carbs</b>	<b>Simple carbs</b>	<b>Mixture of complex and simple carbs</b>
Bread	Sugar	Cakes
Pasta	Jam	Biscuits
Rice	Honey	Puddings
Noodles	Yoghurt	Sweet pastries
Oats	<a href="#">Fromage Frais</a>	Cheesecake
Breakfast cereals	Ice Cream	Breakfast cereals Sweetened
<a href="#">Pulses</a> (beans such as Lima, kidney, lentils)	Jelly	Bananas
Baked beans	Raisins	Grapes
Apricots/Peaches	Full sugar juice	Oranges
Potatoes/Sweetcorn		Soft drinks, Sprite & energy drinks

If you do not eat enough carbs (kcal/energy) then you will not have the energy to complete the match (or training) and subsequently your performance will suffer, and more importantly you will be more susceptible to injury.

## **Fluids**

We have done good food, and we have looked at what snacks can boost the body during and after a match or training session. Now let's look at what you should drink.

The water lost from the body during sweating needs to be replaced to stop you getting tired quickly, and also speed up the recovery process – that means feeling fitter and sharper afterwards a lot sooner.

### **These checks will help players:**

- Weight – 1kg of weight loss during training is equal to 1 litre of fluid lost. As well as the normal 6-8 glasses of water per day, the water lost through sweating must be replaced.
- The “pee test” – If your urine is dark coloured, it means you need to have a drink. Lots of trips to the toilet, producing clear coloured urine, shows you have taken on enough fluid.
- Thirst – Being thirsty is an unreliable indicator of when you need to have a drink. If you're thirsty, you're actually already partly dehydrated, so if you finish training session and your gasping it's a good give away you have not taken on enough fluids.

### **What's best to drink?**

For soccer players, the best fluid to drink is a diluted carbohydrate/electrolyte solution. In plain English, that's the kind of drinks like Gatorade, Powerade, Isostar, and Lucozade Sport.

I personally make my own sports drink: 1 Litre of diluted squash, lemon or orange, or half fruit juice and half water with a pinch of salt. Basically that is a good enough sports drink and costs pennies!

### **How much should I drink?**

Only a little – but often. If you drink too much too quickly all that will happen is you will get stomachache.

Don't drink fizzy sports drinks just before a game either; they are OK after a match

### **Menu for a typical day of the match starting at 3pm:**

#### **Breakfast:**

- Cereal with semi-skimmed milk, or full fat for kids.
- Toast with low fat spread, jam or marmalade and any other bread.
- Fruit or yoghurts.
- Fry-ups: bacon/sausage grilled or cold meats.
- Eggs scrambled-boiled or poached.
- Baked beans
- Fluid: water – fruit juice – glass of milk, unfortunately tea & coffee are diuretics!

#### **Snacks:**

- fruit – cereal bars in between breakfast/lunch.
- Chocolate – mars bars – snickers are OK but in moderation!
- NO Potato Chips, they are just sticks of fat!

#### **Light lunch:**

- From 11.30am
- Pasta – rice – chicken grilled
- Salads with tuna
- Jacket potatoes with baked beans and or tuna, and steamed veg.

**Fluid intake** for the day should be at least 2-2 ½ litres of water, sipping all day.

For kids, they need at least 1-1 ½ litres of water before lunch.

**For halftime** try some Jaffa cakes or bananas or grapes for a quick boost.

Mangos are now taking over the Orange as a high carb halftime snack; one Mango contains about 42 grams of carbs compared to the Orange that has about 15 grams!

**And don't forget full time treats**, now the match is over, the players can get a treat as a reward for competing/winning a game, but only after the game!

Gone are the days of sandwiches and a cup of tea at half time, even for the grass roots players, food and nutrition is a big part of the soccer players life.

Eat & play well, and also, have fun!