

Fueling for Soccer

The four time zones of sports nutrition

1. Training days prior to competition

the typical routine now is to gradually reduce training volume and intensity while increasing the fraction of the total diet that is carbohydrates. This will help the muscles load up extra glycogen (the main fuel for muscles) for the game.

Most research shows that the muscle glycogen levels of (male) soccer players are no better than those of the spectators in the stands: not good.

Studies on soccer players have shown that those with the most pre-game muscle glycogen run the farthest at the fastest speeds during a game.

2. Day of competition

Most pre-game meals are eaten three or four hours prior to competition. But realize that the food eaten then will have little to do with the energy expended in the game.

Remember, however, that the more calories (i.e. fat and protein) in a meal, the slower the food leaves the stomach. Carbohydrates are again the best choice; take fruits, cereals, juices, pancakes/waffles etc. over sausage, eggs, steak, or many choices on the breakfast menu at a fast food restaurant.

3. Eating during competition

Carbohydrate supplement drinks given before the game and at halftime have been shown to increase running volume and intensity in the second half in soccer players.

4. Eating after the game.

The game uses muscle glycogen (carbohydrate) so it must be replaced.

Research has shown that muscle is especially receptive to carbohydrate replacement in the first two hours after exhaustive exercise.

When playing twice in one day, it is all the more important to get some carbohydrates back into the muscles quickly.

Remember, fast foods are high in fat and protein and can remain in the stomach at the start of the next game (depending on when it was eaten and how much was eaten) and doesn't return much in the way of carbohydrates to the muscles.

Eating for sports performance requires a bit of planning and clock watching, but can lead to improvements in performance. When you do it properly, you will notice that you have more energy late in games and in the second of back-to-back games.

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