

# Nutrition and the Soccer Player

Adjusting diet to improve performance on the field is not a new concept for the adult athlete, but it may be new territory for kids and parents. In the rush to get to practice/game on time, “adequate muscle glycogen” is the last thing on their minds.

The best reason to learn more about the role diet has in soccer performance RIGHT NOW is this: you have much greater influence on your kids’ diets when they’re young. Once they hit those teenage years, the odds of them showing any interest in your new thoughts on performance and sports nutrition are about the same as for your helpful suggestions on improving their grades in school. Instill some of these ideas now so that when they’re older, the actions taken will be due to their own initiative.

It takes time to figure out what works best for each child. Many kids find that what worked for them as 8 year olds no longer applies, that they are no longer able to run onto the field with pancake syrup dripping from their chins. It’s not an easy chore to differentiate between the many variables affecting performance on the field, but awareness of the potential benefits of nutrition is the first step. Teach your player to watch for successful patterns of when and how their nutrition habits enhance their play: “Gee, I wonder if you’d have felt more energy in that game if you hadn’t eaten a cheeseburger an hour before the game.” or “ You’ve been playing great since you started drinking Gatorade during half-time.” Ultimately, your player should take on more of the responsibility of choosing the right time and the right choices for food and drink to enhance play on the field.

Trying to improve a kid’s diet is no easy task, so target one or two changes that can be achieved with your player’s cooperation and agreement. Experiment with changes on practice days, not on game days. Obviously, the greater the playing time on the field, the more useful will be these guidelines.

The nutrition handouts I’ve sent to team managers in the past are for the most part unchanged:

- Tournament Nutrition
- Tournament Eating and Drinking

The links below offer information excerpted from various sports nutrition sites. Although minor differences in advice will be seen between the sites, the overall message will be consistent:

1. What you eat during the week impacts performance on the weekend.
2. What you eat on game day impacts performance on the field.
3. What you eat after games impacts performance for the next game.
4. Quantity and type of fluids you drink before, during, and after games impact performance.

- Nutrition and Soccer Performance
- Fueling for Soccer
- Eating Before Competing
- The Training Diet – Week Round Recovery  
How Soccer Players Can Overcome Second Half Slump
- Better Soccer: Proper Hydration
- Fluid Intake