

## Nutrition for your player's peak performance

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### Nutrition that makes the play

Just like a winning race car, playing hockey requires the right fuel. The right nutrition and eating habits can have a significant effect on your training and development. As a minor league player, you are also balancing the nutritional needs of a developing body with the extra requirements of an athlete.

#### Carbs, fat and protein

We've all heard about Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps's training diet that includes an estimated 6,000 calories--about half from carbohydrates, a little less than half from fat, and about 15% protein. Healthy carbohydrates like whole grains, whole wheat pasta, brown or wild rice, grain cereals, fresh fruits and juices, beans and peas, and sweet or white potatoes with skin are key for working muscles. Leslie Bonci, Director of Sports Nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh, says that nutrition that includes fat does not mean fast food: "Athletes need fat, but they need to be selective about the type of fat and whenever possible choose unsaturated fats such as olive or canola oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds."

#### Meal timing is key

For pre-hockey meals and snacks, a little planning can make a big difference in your on-ice success. Timing of meals and snacks is an important issue for athletes to help them get the calories and nutrients they need without feeling stuffed and interfering with competition.

Tips for healthy eating before a game or skating session:

A pre-game meal should:

- Be a small portion for energy, not bulk
- Be eaten 2-3 hours before the event, to prevent feeling full and sluggish on the ice
- Be composed of mainly complex carbohydrates
- Be moderate in protein and fats, which are more difficult to digest
- Include water
- Not be too high in fibre
- Include food you enjoy and that will give you the energy you need

Small pre-game meals do not reflect how you should be eating in general. You will need a lot of calories and it is normal to eat a great deal during the development part of your season. The pre-game meal simply refers to the 2-3 hours prior to your ice time or training time.

Some great portable snacks to keep your energy up between games or during practice:

- Fruit that is peeled and cut up (to digest quicker)
- Bananas
- Whole grain crackers, bread or rice cakes with nut butter, honey or jam
- Yoghurt cups with seeds, nuts or grain crackers
- Handfuls of almonds or other nuts
- Protein or fruit bars

#### Hydration is key

Sufficient hydration will enhance the body's ability to rebound from stress during the course of the game. The commonly held belief that drinking water while exercising can cause stomach cramps, is a myth, in fact, it may be dangerous not to drink water while exercising. Thirst is not a good indicator of fluid needs--the mechanism of thirst is actually dulled during and following exercise. Water leaves the stomach faster than concentrated liquids like sports drinks or fruit juices and is still the best fluid replacer. Drink about one glass of water 15 minutes before practice and Remember that frequent sips of water--as opposed to one-time gulps--allows the water to stay in your body longer.

#### After the game

Recovery is also critical to repairing muscles and getting them ready for the next event. Nutritionist Bonci advises athletes to think of recovery as the appetizer -- followed by a meal within an hour or two -- and then rest. She further suggests that eating too much can interfere with the body's ability to sleep or get a good rest. Remember that you're fueling a body that is growing and spending significant energy on the ice. Basic nutrition rules are to eat healthy, lean toward a complex carbohydrate balance during peak game time, stay hydrated and rest to recover faster.

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