

Teen Nutrition for Fall Sports

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Fall is a great season for stop-and-go sports such as soccer, football and basketball. Your teen athlete needs power for quick, strong moves and endurance for practices and games. But how do you make sure that your active teen gets the necessary nutrients to fuel both? Here are four nutrition tips to keep in mind.

Food Is Fuel

You wouldn't put cheap gas in a luxury car, so why put calories from unhealthy fats and added sugars in your teen athlete's body? Individual calorie needs vary depending on age, sex, type and amount of activity, as well as other factors. Because young athletes are still growing, their food intake

needs to include enough calories to fuel their activity level and to support growth and development.

On average, active teenage boys need 3,000 to 4,000 calories a day, while teenage girls who are active may need 2,400 to 3,000 calories daily. Choose quality calories from fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, low-fat dairy, lean protein foods and heart-healthy fats. These foods provide the nutrients athletes need.

- Breakfast is a great time for whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk and fruit or whole-grain waffles with peanut butter, banana and yogurt.
- Prior to lunch at school, review the cafeteria's menu and help your teen choose performance foods. Bean and beef burritos topped with salsa, or grilled chicken sandwiches with coleslaw, deliver nutrients needed for afternoon practices
- For dinner, spaghetti with meat sauce accompanied by a salad or vegetables and whole-grain Italian bread with olive or canola oil spread plus low-fat milk is a great recovery meal.
- Keep nutritious snacks handy — fresh fruit; veggies and hummus; low-fat cheese and yogurt; and low-fat microwave popcorn.

Carbs Are King

Carbohydrates are the most important fuel for an athlete. Carbs are stored as fuel inside muscles and athletes need full carbohydrate stores before activity. Carbs also are needed after a workout to get ready for the next day's events. Carbs are the only fuel that can be used for power moves — a slam dunk, a sprint to the goal line or an overhead smash all need carbohydrates.

- Eat a light snack before practice (especially if your teen has an early lunch period), such as half a turkey sandwich or an orange and string cheese, along with 1 to 2 cups of water.
- After practice or a game, refuel with a sports drink or low-fat milk, a banana and a handful of trail mix.

Build Muscle with Protein from Foods

Eat real food and shun expensive protein supplements. Muscles can get all the protein they need from foods!

- Lean meat, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, and tempeh are excellent protein sources.

- Tofu, edamame, beans (such as black beans), chickpeas, lentils, and several nuts and seeds also are good sources of protein.
- Include some protein in every meal to help muscles recover.

Pack Snacks

Active teens need snacks to boost calories. Here are some backpack-friendly snacks:

- Sports drinks or 100% juice boxes
- Trail mix
- Peanut butter crackers
- Granola bars
- Fig bars
- Dried fruit or fruit puree pouches (such as applesauce)

For individualized nutrition guidance for young athletes, consult a registered dietitian nutritionist who specializes in sports nutrition. To [find a dietitian](#) in your area, search the Academy's Find a Nutrition Expert database.

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