



NUTRITION AND HYDRATION FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE



Hockey season is back on track, but before you go out to play, have you made sure your body is properly fueled? Proper nutrition is absolutely vital because a machine cannot operate without fuel. Athletes are the machine, food is your fuel. Skating and playing hard require lots of energy and enough fluids to keep you in the game. To get the most out of your performance, here are some sport nutrition tips to ensure that you are power-fueled and well hydrated before and after hockey practices and games.

The foods you eat can be broken down into three main categories: carbohydrates, protein and fat. All athletes should eat a balanced diet with a healthy mix of these macronutrients. For a hockey player, an important decision is deciding on the best ratio for optimal performance.

Photo by Michael Caples/MiHockey

Carbs are the body's energy source, providing the glycogen used during activity. If an athlete doesn't eat enough carbs, the body will use fat and muscle mass for energy, which isn't ideal. Carbs should be at least 45 percent to 60 percent of a hockey player's daily calorie intake, according to National Strength and Conditioning Association nutrition guidelines.

After a workout or game, you have an optimal "window" of 30 minutes to 90 minutes in which to most effectively replenish protein you used during intense exercise, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture President's Council on Fitness. The recommendation for athletes is to make sure that their post-game meal is rich in protein, fairly low in fat so it's easy to digest and contains some easily digested carbs to replenish glycogen. Foods to consider include smoothies, sandwiches and cereal. This is the time when sugary bars and even chewy candy work well to raise blood glucose levels quickly.

For a serious athlete, it is important to replenish protein stores at every meal, but particularly after an intense workout. While regular food works fine, it can take longer to digest. Some hockey players may prefer a protein drink. A protein shake or drink is easy to digest, and you can consume it quickly during the "window." It also allows you to carefully achieve an optimal balance between protein and carbs after a workout.

Choose carbohydrate-rich foods as your best energy fuel. The following foods are chock full of carbohydrates: breads and cereals (toast, crackers, granola bars, cereal), vegetables and fruit (dried fruit, fruit salad, vegetable soup and salads), legumes (chick peas, lentils, kidney beans, hummus dip), milk and yogurt (plain/chocolate milk, fruit yogurt, kefir).

Be sure to include foods that add protein. The following foods provide a protein punch when they accompany your carbohydrate-rich foods: nut butters (Peanut, almond, cashew, sesame), eggs, milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese hummus dip, more bean than meat chili, lean cuts of meat, poultry and fish.

How much you will need to eat and drink before and after hockey practice and games will depend upon your age, weight, height, gender, the intensity of your practice session or game and the time you spend exercising.

Typical guidelines to fuel your body BEFORE hockey practices or games:

Larger meals should be consumed three to four hours before hockey practices or games to ensure that the food that you eat is digested and you are ready to perform. Sometimes you may not have a lot of time to eat a meal so eat a large snack one to two hours before your workout

to get the energy that you need. For practices lasting, a small snack 15-30 minutes beforehand is a good idea to ensure that you are topped up and ready to go!

It is important to remember that your body needs to be refueled after activity to help your muscles recover and repair. Eat a snack or small meal rich in carbohydrates within an hour or two of finishing your practice or game. Here are some ideas to get you refueled.

Individual sized cereal | Cereal bars/granola bars | Canned fruit (snack packs) | Dried and fresh fruit | Applesauce (individual containers) | Concentrated fruit juice (individual boxes) | Veggie sticks (mixed vegetables) | Trail mix (nuts/seeds/dried fruits) | Bagels, melba toast or bread sticks | Stoned wheat thins | Low fat oatmeal raisin cookies | Fig Newton bars | Popcorn (pre-made at home and bagged) | Jam, honey, peanut butter

Hockey players need to ensure they are drinking enough fluids during their exercise. Water is the number one choice but if you are looking for some extra energy have some sliced oranges with water. Sport drinks have just enough energy to keep you going on the ice and they also have added electrolytes (e.g. sodium and potassium). Adding sport drink crystals to your water bottle helps promote drinking and adds flavor.

Every athlete is different, so experiment to find what foods and fluids work best for you.

Over time including healthy food in your everyday diet gets easier and becomes a wonderful habit. Making small, healthful changes gradually is truly the recipe for success. Eat well, play well.

MEET THE SPORTS DOC

Dr. Jeff S. Pierce serves as Medical Director of the Michigan Sports & Spine Center specializing in comprehensive treatment programs for spine, musculoskeletal and joint injuries including sports and occupational problems. Dr. Pierce treats all types of athletes of all ages and levels and has worked with several professional athletes, including the Detroit Red Wings; has served as team physician for several organizations; and team physician for several elite hockey teams including Belle Tire, Little Caesars, and Oakland Junior Grizzlies.

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