

## Fueling Up For Face Off

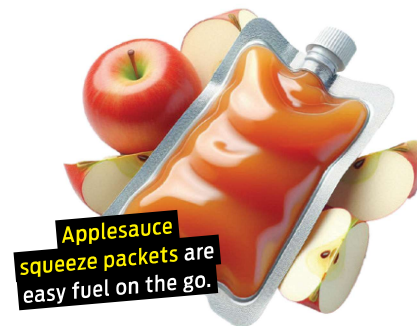
Team Nutritionist For The Minnesota Wild Shares Her Essential Game Day Tips → *By Michael Stuart, MD with Jenna Stangland*



to-three-hour window before the game, I like to recommend snacks or small meals with a 2:1 carbohydrate to protein ratio. The goal is to have the athlete fueled up and not hungry when the game starts.

Here are some foods with a 2:1 carbohydrate to protein ratio:

- Turkey bagel sandwich.
- Rice bowl with protein on it.
- Greek yogurt with honey, granola or fruit.
- Oatmeal topped with peanut butter, honey drizzle, berries (Minnesota Wild Special).



If it's crunch time, say 30-60 minutes before the game, I recommend easy-to-digest carbohydrates with a glass of water.

Favorite snacks for crunch time:

- Applesauce squeeze packets.
- Fruit strips or fruit bars.
- Slushy made out of a sports drink with a scoop of protein powder.

**Q:** *My son plays 12U travel hockey. Our schedules are hectic and it's tough to make sure he eats right because he is a picky eater. I always thought that carb-loading on game day was the way to go, so I gave him chicken alfredo pasta with broccoli about 90 minutes before puck drop. I had never seen him move slower on the ice. What should my son be eating on game day so he's ready to go?*

— Seth D., Bedford, N.Y.

**A:** Nutrition plays a crucial role in the performance and overall health of hockey players of all ages. Understanding what to eat before, during and after a game can give athletes the energy they need to perform their best on the ice and to enhance their postgame recovery.

Jenna Stangland, the team nutritionist for the Minnesota Wild and a nationally recognized leader in sports nutrition, shared some

great information that will help parents make better decisions when making food choices for their young athletes.

### What is the best food and ideal time to eat before a game?

**Stangland:** Ideally, a player should eat something about 2 hours before puck drop. Although, keep in mind that everyone is a little different as far as how quickly (or slowly) they digest their food. Generally, in the one-

- Peanut butter and jelly cut into quarters on white bread (avoid whole grain breads close to game time).
- Banana, honey and a little bit of peanut butter on white bread cut in quarters. You can substitute rice cakes for the bread if you are looking for a gluten-free option.

### What foods should players avoid on game day?

**Stangland:** Avoiding foods high in fiber and/or high in fat is necessary because they will sit in the stomach and take a long time to digest compared to other foods. Junk food choices such as potato chips, chocolate candy bars and donuts are examples of no-go foods on game days.

To address Seth's question, chicken alfredo with broccoli is not the right choice because alfredo and other creamy pasta sauces have such a high fat content, they are going to take a long time to digest, and this can really slow a player down on the ice. And while broccoli is a wonderfully healthy green vegetable, it is also a poor choice on game day. Its high fiber content means it will sit in the stomach for a long time as the body works to digest it, making a player feel heavy and sluggish. Brussels sprouts, avocado and beans also fall into this category.



If you have questions for Dr. Hockey, please email Justin.Felisko@usahockey.org

### What is a preferred drink of choice in the immediate postgame period?

**Stangland:** You want to look for a 3:1 ratio of carbohydrates to protein after the game. Following all that energy expenditure, you need extra carbohydrates to replace the loss.

- Chocolate milk is an ideal example of a 3:1 carbohydrate to protein ratio. I also like chocolate milk post-game because it contains magnesium, which is essential for muscle recovery.
- Another great option is a coconut water-based sports drink that contains potassium to replace sweat losses. In keeping with the 3:1 carbs to protein ratio, I would recommend adding a protein powder to the coconut water or sports drink.



Down some chocolate milk to help with muscle recovery.

- A fantastic postgame all-in-one option is a liquid yogurt smoothie drink. Not only does it keep with the 3:1 ratio, but the probiotics it contains help maintain a healthy gut. We often think about tired or sore muscles after a game, but it's important to remember that a competitive hockey game also puts stress on the GI tract.



A burrito bowl has all the right ingredients for postgame recovery.

### What meals do you recommend players eat once they arrive at home after the game?

**Stangland:** I have some favorites:

- A burrito bowl that includes a carbohydrate base and a topping of protein with some color (i.e. vegetables) to help muscle recovery.
- Stir fry with a base of rice and a protein of your choice.
- Grilled chicken with brown rice and roasted potatoes or sweet potatoes. This meal provides a great balance of carbs, protein and nutrients to help body recover.

### What do you recommend for kids who prefer a beige diet? (i.e. those who love the highly processed pastas, white breads, mac and cheese, etc. and don't like to eat anything with color)

**Stangland:** On the Wild, we have some picky beige eaters, so this is not a problem unique to kids. In fact, we probably all could use a little more color in our diets. Our strategy for Wild players has been to utilize sauces to get them to expand their palate. Coating foods in teriyaki sauce, barbecue sauce, cheese sauce or tomato sauce introduces new flavors for them to explore, which is a great first step in getting them to try something new.

Another strategy is to add new foods to meals they are already comfortable eating. For example, if a player likes eggs, you can prepare a scramble or an omelet and mix in some greens or other veggies to add some color and nutrients.

I also like to throw spinach or avocado into smoothies. It changes the color but not usually the flavor too much.

I recommend having players get involved with food preparation. Whether that's simply adding food to the blender for smoothies or preparing more complex meals, getting involved makes the new food seem more familiar. I've found this strategy works great for the 12U player as well as the 30-year-old professional hockey player!



Oatmeal is always a great gluten-free option.

### What are some food options for players who follow a gluten-free diet?

**Stangland:** Players following gluten-free diets are not uncommon these days, so I have several suggestions:

- Gluten-free rice cakes are a great substitute for breads or crackers.
- Applesauce packets are a favorite in-game snack.
- Honey Stinger waffles are available in a gluten-free option and are a great in-game choice
- Any rice dish, such as a rice bowl or a wrap that is made with rice paper.
- A potato bowl or potatoes in any form.
- Oatmeal is a great pre-game choice. The Minnesota Wild have an oatmeal bar for players so they can add their toppings of choice (honey, fresh fruit, etc.). ☆

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