Nutrition for Athletes

What diet is best for athletes?

✓ All athletes need a diet that provides enough calories. Calories give our body energy. Eat a variety of foods every day like whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans, lean meats, and low fat milk products.

Are carbohydrates important for athletes?

✓ YES! Carbohydrates provide the body with fuel.
✓ Carbohydrates are found in every food group! Fruits, vegetables, milk, grains, and even some meats and beans have carbohydrates.
✓ Carbohydrates can be stored in the liver and muscles and used for energy when we exercise.
✓ Most exercises do not use up all of the carbohydrate stores in our body, so eating carbohydrates during exercise usually is not needed.
✓ If exercise is hard and lasts for longer than 60 minutes, carbohydrates in the form of a sports drink are helpful for fuel.

Hydration is Key!

✓ Fluids are very important. Becoming dehydrated can stop any athlete from playing his or her best.
✓ To stay hydrated, athletes need 8-16oz of water a couple of hours before a game, 4-8oz every 15-20 minutes during a game, and another 8-16oz of water a few hours after the game.

Do athletes need extra protein to build muscles?

✓ No! A balanced diet that includes 5-10oz of lean protein from the meats and beans group, and low fat dairy products will supply all of the protein that muscles need.
✓ 2 ounces of peanut butter is the size of a ping pong ball.
  2 ounces of cooked beans is the size of your fist.
  1 whole egg is 1 ounce.
  1 ounce of nuts is 1 handful.
  3 ounces of meat or fish is the size of a computer mouse.
Complex carbohydrates have vitamins, minerals, and fiber that are needed for good health and performance. Whole grains and beans are great sources of complex carbohydrates!

Complex carbohydrates give us energy that is long lasting.

Healthy simple carbohydrates are found in fruits and low-fat milk products.

Less healthy simple carbohydrates include sugars and refined starches found in candy, soda, and white flour.

Healthy simple carbohydrates give us energy right away.

**What should athletes eat before, during, and after exercise?**

**BEFORE:** 2-4 hours before exercise, eat complex carbohydrates and protein for longer lasting energy. Try a turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread! 15 minutes-2 hours before exercise eat a light snack with healthy, simple carbohydrates like an apple, string cheese, or cereal and milk for fast acting energy. Make sure to drink 8-16 ounces of water 1-2 hours before exercise to prevent dehydration.

**DURING:** If exercise is hard and continuous for longer than 1 hour, sports drinks are beneficial to provide fuel for the muscles. Drink 4-8 ounces of water or sports drink every 15-20 minutes during exercise to stay hydrated.

**AFTER:** After hard and continuous exercise, it is important to eat a nutritious well balanced meal with vegetables, protein, and carbohydrate-rich foods. Be sure to drink 8-16 ounces of water 1-2 hours after exercise to prevent dehydration. Low fat milk is a great option too!