



Get Up & Move!

Parent Newsletter

Series 3: June

Sports Nutrition

Many of today's youth are involved in extracurricular sports activities. Because so many young people are athletes, this month's topic focuses on sports nutrition. All children need to eat balanced meals and have a healthy diet. But should that balance change if your child is on a sports team or working out? Maybe. Children should eat the right mix of foods to support their higher levels of activity, but that mix might not be much different than what is considered a healthy diet. Eating for sports should be an extension of healthy eating for life.

Sports nutrition is for everyone, not just those who are on a sports team. Even those not involved in rigorous activity through a sport need energy for daily activities and exercise. We all need to be concerned about having healthy bones, strong muscles, and a healthy cardiovascular system. While athletes or very active people may need more calories than less active people and more water because of the loss of water through perspiration, athletes do not need to eat a lot of extra protein or special kinds of protein. Athletes also do not need special sports drinks or pills to give them more energy.

If your child is eating healthy, well-balanced meals and snacks, your child is probably getting the nutrients that he or she needs to perform well in sports. MyPyramid can provide you with guidance on what kinds of foods and drinks should be included in your child's well-balanced meals and snacks. But children who are involved in strenuous endurance sports like cross-country running or competitive swimming, which involve 1 ½ to 2 hours of activity at a time, may need to consume more food to keep up with their increased energy demands.

It is important that any child is getting the following nutrients: vitamins and minerals, such as calcium and iron; protein from meat and poultry, dairy products, and nuts; and carbohydrates for energy. For a young athlete, carbohydrates are an important source of fuel. Without carbohydrates, your child may be running on empty. When choosing carbohydrates, look for whole-grain foods that are less processed. It is also important that young athletes drink plenty of fluid to avoid any heat illnesses or dehydration. It's a good idea for your child to drink water or other fluids throughout the day, but especially before, during, and after periods of extended physical activity.

(Sources: www.kidshealth.org, USDA, 4-H Sports Nutrition Guide)