

Fueling Your Young Athlete

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Summer is here, and your young athlete is likely showing no signs of slowing down. While their natural inclination for physical activity is a slam dunk for long-term health, the potential lack of structure brought on by summer means parents and caregivers will want to stay tuned-in to how their children are fueling their bodies.

According to *Nutrition for Kids*, a website dedicated to children's health and nutrition education, you'll want to keep the following in mind:



Photo credit: Miranda Bright, MS

Good Hydration

The nutrient of most immediate concern is water. Drink it before, during and after participating in physical activity for best hydration, rather than waiting until thirsty.

Sports drinks are only helpful when excessive amounts of sweat are lost by being out in the heat or participating in vigorous activity for longer than 90 minutes. Stick with water to keep those sneaky added sugars at bay.

Snack Smart

Make time for snacks that will keep your child energized. Yogurt with a banana, baby carrots with hummus dip, or peanut butter with crackers and apple slices are all examples of smart snacks that require minimal time and effort to prepare. Check out the No-Bake Energy Bites recipe in this newsletter for a smart snack the whole family can have fun making together.

However, if these do not fit into your schedule, or you are needing an option that does not require refrigeration, look for quick, easy, non-perishable bars at the grocery store. They can be a great solution for an on-the-go family. Be sure to check the label for whole ingredients such as oats, whole grains, nuts, seeds and fruit for best nutrition. And prioritize protein content, while limiting added sugar. Compare labels to make the best selection.

No-Bake Energy Bites

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup quick oats
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup wheat bran
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup honey
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup almond or peanut butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon slivered almonds
2 tablespoons chocolate chips (optional)
2 tablespoons dried mixed berries

1. Wash your hands and the food preparation surface.
2. Mix together oats and wheat bran in a bowl.
3. Combine honey, nut butter, and vanilla extract in a separate bowl. Stir until well-mixed.
4. Combine wet mixture and dry mixture.
5. Stir in almonds, chocolate chips, and dried mixed berries.
6. Put on a pair of disposable food safe gloves.
7. Spray cooking spray on one hand. Rub hands together.
8. Roll mixture into 15 balls and serve.
9. If not serving immediately, cover and refrigerate.

Nutrition Facts: 1 ball, Calories 75, Total Fat 3 grams, Saturated Fat 1 gram, Carbohydrate 10 grams, Dietary Fiber 1 gram, Total Sugar 6 grams, Added Sugar 5 grams, Protein 2 grams.



Fuel and Replenish

An eating pattern high in saturated fat and added sugar will only serve to hinder your young athlete, especially right before participating in physical activity. Avoid things like fried foods and candy bars before practices or games.

Be sure your child replenishes their body after being physically active, with plenty of fluids (preferably water) and a nutrient-rich meal or snack with a healthy combination of fats, lean protein and whole grains—think bean burrito or a slice of pizza loaded with vegetables. For breakfast—think fruit and yogurt smoothies or an omelet with cheese and vegetables.

Balanced Nutrition

The more active your child is, the more carbohydrate they'll need to fuel their muscles. Fatigue, weight loss and lack of endurance are signs the body's carbohydrate stores need replenishing. Nutrient-rich foods like starchy vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes will do the trick to get them back on track.

The best way to ensure your child is getting all the nutrients their body needs to grow and develop is by encouraging them to eat foods from each of the five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy. ChooseMyPlate.gov has a wealth of information on incorporating a variety of healthy choices from each food group. Following these recommendations is good for everyone—athlete or not—so your whole family will reap the benefits all summer long.

Sources:

1. Text citation: *Nutrition for Kids*. (2018). *Feeding the Young Athlete*. Retrieved from: <https://nutritionforkids.com/2018/03/09/feeding-the-young-athlete>
2. Recipe citation: *WeCook: Fun with Food and Fitness*. (2018). *No-Bake Energy Bites*. Retrievable here: <https://4h.unl.edu/wecook>