

Keeping Young Athletes Healthy



Young athletes have the challenge of not only fuelling for growth but for their activity as well. Improper fuelling can result in:

- Low energy levels
- Impaired growth and development
- Increased risk of injuries

NUTRITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

Here are some key areas to consider when reviewing a young athlete's diet:

- **Are they getting enough calories?** It's not realistic to have children or their parents count calories. Canada's Food Guide is a good tool for balancing your child's diet, but the number of servings listed for their age groups may be inadequate for very active children. Consult the [Training Diet: Action Plans](#) handout for more information on adapting for athletes.
- **How does nutrition fit into their schedule?** You must consider the training schedule when you plan meals and snacks so that young athletes are not overly full or hungry during training. Smaller meals or light snacks may be more appropriate for after school training than a large dinner. Healthy meals and snacks should be offered frequently, about every 2-3 hours. The following tip sheets provide further information on planning and timing:
 - [Sport Nutrition for Parents](#)
 - [Snacks for Young Participants in Community Sports](#)
 - [Fueling the Young Athlete](#)
 - [Fluids and Foods BEFORE Training/Competition](#)
- **Recovery nutrition** – Children who train daily or twice daily need to pay particular attention to what they eat after training.

Regardless of the type of activity, young athletes should consume 2 to 3 servings of carbohydrate-rich foods such as grains or fruits within 30 minutes after training to help with muscle fuel recovery. For athletes trying to build muscle, a small amount of protein is beneficial and can be obtained from 1-2 servings of milk and alternatives or meat and alternatives. See the [Fluids and Foods AFTER Training/Competition](#) handout for more ideas.

- **Picky eaters** – Many children refuse healthy foods in favour of less nutritious foods. While they still get enough calories, they often lack important nutrients for health. Tips for picky eaters include:
 - Getting children involved in their food preparation
 - Trying new foods multiple times in different ways
 - Introducing new foods along side familiar favourites

