

A healthy diet keeps your child's body *and* mind functioning at its best. Here are some simple tips and ideas for your athlete and his/her team.

## Stay Hydrated

Water is the best drink before, during and after practice and games. If your child needs convincing, or you want to make it extra special, add some fruit such as lemon or orange slices, strawberries or watermelon.

Generally, it is best to avoid sports drinks, because they contain a lot of sugar. Experts recommend using them only when both of these criteria are met: (1) your child is engaged in *consistently vigorous* exercise for more than 60 minutes and (2) it is hot and humid.

Energy drinks are **not** sports drinks and should never replace water during exercise.

## Before Practice and Games

Sports practice sometimes conflicts with the usual family meal time, but you'll want to feed your child before heading over to the field. Healthy carbohydrates are a smart choice to give kids energy. If kids are eating roughly an hour before playing, include some protein to help keep them from getting hungry again too soon. Examples:

- Whole wheat crackers
- Popcorn (plain, no butter or additives)
- Blueberries
- Raisins
- Peanut butter sandwich with banana
- Yogurt cups or tubes with fruit and/or granola
- Grapes and cheese

Some healthy foods can actually upset stomachs when kids are active. Avoid vegetables like sweet potatoes, potatoes, and bell peppers right before games and practices.

## After Practice and Games

Foods that help replenish lost fluids and energy should be consumed after practice and games. Items that are easy to have on hand as you watch the next game or leave the field include:

- Pre-cut orange slices
- Watermelon triangles
- Grapes
- Banana
- Applesauce packs
- Pretzels or whole grain crackers
- Graham crackers
- Cheese stick
- Homemade trail mix of whole grain cereal (such as Cheerios) and dried fruit

Of course, these suggestions aren't the *only* foods you can serve your young athlete before and after practice and games, but it is helpful to remember that athletes may have special nutrition needs. Many experts recommend a pre-game and post-game plate that is 50-60% carbohydrate, 25-30% fruits and vegetables, and 15-20% protein.