

## FACT SHEET

# FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT – NETBALL

### ABOUT NETBALL

Netball games are played in four 10-15 minute quarters with a short break between each quarter. Teams may be up to 12 players, with 7 players on the court at any one time. Because of the stop-and-go style of play, both the aerobic and anaerobic energy systems are used during a game or training. This means that both recreational and elite players require endurance, strength, speed, agility and ball-handling skills.

Netball is played from a young age (primary school age) through to masters levels. In Australia, netball is predominantly played by women, however there are also men's and mixed competitions are also played throughout the country in certain regions.

Nutritional demands will depend on the predominant position played by each individual. A netball court is split into thirds and these thirds are used to create strict positional zones that dictate where players can and can't go on the court. Because of this, some positions (e.g. centre, wing attack, wing defense, goal attack, goal defense) cover great distances over a match than other positions that are limited to only one third of the court (e.g. goal keeper, goal shooter).

Training sessions may range from one session per week to one to two sessions per day. These may cover individual ball skills and goal shooting practice, team strategies, weights, running and high intensity sprints.

Elite netball players tend to be active all year round, and competition is can be made up of multiple games per week or weekend 'away' tours. At a recreational level, games are usually played in the evenings during the week or on weekends. At junior levels, players may be playing in multiple teams (e.g. school, club, state representative squad) which can increase the training and competition load and therefore increase nutritional needs to meet this demand.

### TRAINING DIET

A general healthy eating pattern helps to support the needs of fit, energetic and lean netball player. Nutrition

should be based around lean proteins for muscle repair and recovery, carbohydrate appropriately timed for fuel. In addition, fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and wholegrains provide important vitamins and minerals, along with some healthy fats.

Individual nutrition requirements will be determined by training load, specific athlete needs, training goals, body composition goals, health and adjustment for growth in younger athletes.

Timing of food is key to success. Adjusting portions and spacing meals and snacks throughout the day can improve nutrient absorption and help with meeting fuelling and recovery nutrition goals.

### FLUID NEEDS

Netball is a fast moving game that requires high-intensity running, fast decision-making and skillful ball handling. Studies have shown that dehydration can negatively impact performance, specifically shooting accuracy, speed, agility concentration and co-ordination.

In order to stay hydrated, players should drink fluids should before, during and after training and matches. However, body fluid needs will depend on individual fluid losses, which vary depending on individual sweat rate.

If playing on an indoor air-conditioned court, players may find that they don't sweat as much as if they are playing on a poorly ventilated court, or outdoors in the summer heat. Hot playing conditions will result in noticeably high body fluid losses; however, players should also be aware that they can still lose significant amounts of body fluids when playing in air-conditioned venues. Rather than relying on perceived sweat rate or thirst to determine fluid needs, players are encouraged to assess their unique sweat rate to guide how much to drink during training and games and for recovery.

The aim is to start any exercise session or competition well hydrated. This requires drinking regularly throughout the day leading up to training or competition. Having a drink with all meals and snacks is a good start.

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## EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

It's important to start games well-fuelled. Each athlete is different, but players will often eat a pre-game meal around 3 to 4 hours before the start of the match. This meal should contain some carbohydrate for fuel as well as some fluids for hydration. A small amount of protein in the pre-game meal is also useful, as it can help to prevent hunger during the game.

Some suitable pre-game meal ideas can include:

- Wrap or sandwich with chicken and salad
- Bowl of muesli with yoghurt and berries
- Pasta with chicken in tomato-based sauce
- Soup served with bread rolls
- Stir-fry with noodles or rice

Many players will also have an additional small snack 1-2 hours prior to the game. This is often something light that is rich in carbohydrate but relatively low in fat and fibre so it is easy to digest.

Some suitable pre-game snack ideas include:

- Yoghurt with fruit salad
- Banana and a handful of almonds
- Peanut butter on rice cakes
- Toast with vegemite

If solids don't sit well before a game, or players are very nervous, a liquid source of protein and carbohydrate such as a fruit smoothie can be a good option.

## EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

Indoor environments, combined with high-intensity exercise can lead to high sweat losses, especially in players who cover a lot of the court (e.g. centre, wing attack). Frequent quarter and half time breaks, provide the perfect opportunity to get some fluids in.

While water is the priority fluid during training and for hydration during the day, and in most matches. Sports or electrolyte drinks may be useful during a game for players identified as having high energy requirements or heavy fluid losses as they can deliver some carbohydrates and electrolytes.

During tournament settings it is important to keep fuel levels topped up over the day to prevent fatigue. Light, easy to digest carbohydrate rich snacks such as muesli bars, fresh fruit, flavoured milk and simple sandwiches are all good options for refuelling between games.

Players should work closely with an Accredited Sports Dietitian to trial nutrition strategies during training and matches to find which foods work best for each player.

## RECOVERY

Recovery nutrition has three important aspects:

- Refuel muscle glycogen (carbohydrate stores)
- Repair muscle (for function & development)
- Rehydrate (replace fluids lost through sweat)

Recovery meals and snacks should therefore contain carbohydrate (fuel), some protein (for muscle repair and development) and plenty of fluids and electrolytes to replace sweat losses.

A recovery meal or snack should be consumed soon after exercise period, remembering that recovery nutrition extends well beyond the initial hours post-game, particularly when the next training session or game is the next day. Fluids (mainly water) should also be consumed, based on estimated losses.

Some recovery food suggestions include:

- Egg and salad sandwich
- Flavoured milk tetra packs or smoothies
- Chicken and vegetable risotto
- Homemade beef burgers with cheese and salad

## OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

- **Be organised** Players should have snacks ready to go at the stadium as it can be difficult to rely on the venue to provide appropriate choices.
- **Iron levels** Some players may have problems with low iron levels, especially females or those who limit red meat in their diet. Iron levels should be checked regularly during heavy training or if fatigue levels are unusual. Speak to an Accredited Sports Dietitian for strategies to increase iron in the diet.