



## FACT SHEET

### FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT - SOFTBALL

#### ABOUT SOFTBALL

Softball is a high intensity, fast game played between two teams of 9 players. Similar to baseball, a match is played over 7 innings with teams alternating between batting and fielding each time a team goes "out", therefore, the duration of a match can vary greatly. Theoretically all members of the team bat and field, but pitching (which is always underarm) is the role of specialist pitchers. Softball requires strength, power, agility, speed and a range of skills. It also requires good mental concentration as athletes can have less than half a second to react to a ball pitched at them at speeds as high as 120km/hr for women and 150km/hr for men!

Softball is typically played over the summer months. Although softball is predominately played by women (~75% of players in Australia are female), both men and women can play the sport. Players can start from as young as 5 or 6 years old, in modified games that introduce softball-specific skills through fun game based activities, and continue to play through to Masters level.

#### TRAINING DIET

Softball training sessions can be demanding as they can consist of different combinations of activities including weights, fitness, and sprint training and specific skill practice. Depending on the level of the athlete, at times these sessions can last for up to 2-3 hours. The intensity of training sessions varies greatly so it is important that players match their energy and carbohydrate intake to their training level each day. Recovery between training sessions is important, especially if players have more than one training session in a day or a number of sessions over consecutive days. Recovery helps your muscles to recover and adapt to each training session. A carbohydrate and protein based recovery meal or snack should be consumed shortly after finishing training. For players trying to manage their weight, the next main meal can double as a recovery meal if it is within ~60-90 minutes of finishing training.

In general, successful softball players are strong, powerful and fast. High body fat levels can limit speed and agility and therefore impairing performance. To manage your body fat levels, limit high energy foods and drinks (e.g. soft drinks, lollies, cakes, chocolate, fried foods, takeaway foods, biscuits and alcohol). Instead choose meals and snacks based on high nutrient foods and drinks (e.g. wholegrain cereals, fruit, vegetables, low fat dairy products, lean meat, chicken, fish, soy products, nuts, seeds, legumes and water). Keeping portion sizes in check and eating smaller meals and snacks over the day can help to manage appetite and prevent overeating.

#### FLUID NEEDS

Softball players need to be proactive in maintaining good hydration levels as dehydration can negatively affect power, skill and decision making, therefore performance. Training and competing in the outdoors in hot conditions increases the risk of dehydration. Tournament settings with more than one match in a day can also make maintaining good hydration levels difficult. Each individual's fluid requirements vary according to sweat rate, training or match duration and intensity, temperature and humidity. Athletes should take a drink bottle to training and matches to take advantage of opportunities to sip on fluids during the session. For more information see the Fluid in Sport factsheet.

#### WHAT SHOULD I EAT BEFORE MATCHES?

The main pre-match meal should be eaten around 2-4 hours before to the start of a match. It should be carbohydrate based and, to avoid stomach discomfort, foods low in fibre and fat may be preferred. For example, pasta with tomato based sauce, sandwich with light fillings, rice based dish, cereal with low fat milk. A light, carbohydrate snack (e.g. fruit, yoghurt, cereal bar, toast with spread) in the 1-2 hours leading up to a match can help provide a final "top up" of fuel stores. Nervous athletes may find it difficult to eat before an event. These athletes may prefer to have light to eat earlier in the day to allow for digestion. Liquid based carbohydrates (e.g. fruit smoothie, Sustagen SportTM) may also be easier for nervous athletes to consume.

#### EATING & DRINKING DURING MATCHES?

Players with high workloads may benefit from consuming a carbohydrate snack during play to keep up fuel supplies for the brain and muscles. Chopped fruit or muesli bars can be quick, easy to eat options.

If playing more than one match in a day, eating a light carbohydrate snack between matches (e.g. sandwich, creamed rice, crackers with spread, fruit buns) between matches will help sustain energy levels over the day. Players should also sip on water throughout the day to help prevent dehydration. In some situations, sports drink may also be useful as they provide both fluid and carbohydrate.



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#### WHAT ABOUT RECOVERY

Recovery is particularly important during tournament settings with more than one match in a day or when matches are less than 1-2 days apart. It is important to replenish fuel stores with carbohydrate-rich foods after training and games as well as include lean protein to help muscle tissue repair and growth.

Eating a recovery meal or snack that contains carbohydrates, protein and a source of fluid within ~60 minutes of finishing will help kick start the recovery process. For more details see the Recovery factsheet.

#### OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

It's important to remember that alcohol impairs the recovery process and can slow injury repair. If you have a desire to have alcohol after matches, ensure that you rehydrate with other fluids first (e.g. water or sports drink) and have consumed an appropriate recovery meal. It is then still important to limit the amount of alcohol you consume.

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