

# FACT SHEET

# NUTRITION FOR

# JUNIOR

# ATHLETES



Each day you need energy for school activities, as well as for before and after school training sessions. Plan ahead! This will make sure you take enough food and drinks with you on days you move more, to cover your higher energy needs. Eating enough food will help your body move faster and for longer. Getting to know how much you need to eat can take time but will set you up well for great sporting performance.

## FOOD FOR HEALTH & ENERGY

Food gives us energy. This energy in food comes from structures called carbohydrate, protein and fat. These structures also have other important health related jobs in our body. To make sure you put enough energy in every day, it is important to eat regularly, around every 3-4 hours or six times across the day. Think of this as putting the fuel in that drives exercise and builds a bank of fuel ready for the next day – like a race car! Carbohydrate foods you energy quickly and easily, eat them before and after every training.

Choosing nutrient dense foods will help you meet your nutrition requirements for fueling, health and growth at the same time. This includes growing strong bones and muscle, plus supporting your immune system. Include foods rich in fibre and texture as well as a variety of colours within your everyday choices. If your food variety is small now, slowly work to build this up, work at your own pace.

You can fuel well and keep healthy by packing a wide variety of foods in your lunch box everyday, make the most of all of the time allowed at school to finish your recess and lunch before you go out to play. Eat a nourishing breakfast each morning and replenish your energy levels with your evening meal and supper each night.

## FOOD FOR EXERCISE

Nourishing foods rich in carbohydrate are great to fuel your exercise. Aim for a snack 1.5-2 hours before training and regularly across the day.

### Examples include:

- Milk drinks, yoghurt, cheese, fruit, grainy sandwich, oats, breakfast cereals homemade muffins or slices, nuts, muesli bars, popcorn, baked beans, cereals (chickpeas and fav'va beans) crackers and spread.

If you need to eat with a short amount of time before training then select a smaller amount of food that is digested a bit faster and you know sits well in your tummy, e.g. a white bread sandwich or rice cakes with jam, honey or a banana.

Most of all, make sure you choose foods you enjoy!

## FOODS FOR RECOVERY

Foods rich in protein provide the building blocks of your muscles and fats provide additional energy including fat-soluble vitamins and omega 3's. Your body needs food with protein, fats and carbohydrates in them, spread across the whole day. Your specific needs will differ based on the type and amount of training you do. If you are vegetarian or vegan you may need a little more protein, as your body doesn't digest and use plant protein as well as animal sources.

Protein is found in beef, lamb, chicken, fish, eggs, dairy products, soy products, legumes, lentils, nuts, seeds and in amounts of unrefined breads and cereals. Include a source of protein in at least four of your meals and snacks to help support your needs.

## HYDRATION

Water and milk are great choices of fluid to help support your hydration, development and recovery needs. Water helps to keep your body cool and milk is great for supporting strong bones and teeth! Don't forget to pack a water bottle each day, take it to training and top up during breaks. If it's hot, try to keep your water in a shady spot or icy esky and not too far from where you're training! Coaches should always allow time for a drink break!

## HUNGER

Your appetite can help to tell you how much and how often to eat. It is very important not to ignore hunger or thirst. Harder and longer duration exercise can temporarily numb your appetite. This might mean that later that day or the next day you have a higher hunger level. It is important to include enough food to catch up and meet your hunger levels.

## FOOD SAFETY

Making sure your food doesn't grow bugs during the day is important. Using an insulated lunch box and ice packs to transport the food you plan eat towards the second half of the day will reduce your risk of food poisoning. This is even more important in warm weather. High risk foods are those with a moisture and protein content eg. sliced meats, cheeses, yoghurts and egg.

Long life products such as UHT milk drinks or tinned baked beans, tinned fish (and crackers) are safe options to use as they don't need to be kept cold. Freezing fresh options will also give you more variety to choose from. Frozen or cold food and drinks, will also help you cool down when it's hot. Freezing a water bottle can keep your food cold and give you an extra supply of cold water after school.

Developing good food habits at a young age will help you perform at your best, build great foundations through a food first approach, as well as transition from junior to adolescent and into adulthood.

You do not need sports drinks or other forms of sport specific/medical supplements, unless medically indicated. Always speak to your GP or Accredited Sports Dietitian for further information.