

## FACT SHEET

# FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT – RUGBY SEVENS

## ABOUT RUGBY SEVENS

Rugby Sevens, more commonly referred to as 'Sevens', is a variant of Rugby Union. Rather than 15 players on the field for two 40-minute halves, Sevens involves only 7 players on the field for two, 7-minute halves. There are 12 players in a team with unlimited interchange, but often teams make only two or three over a game.

Sevens is played in a tournament format from an amateur, school, university and club level often over the summer months in Australia. A tournament takes place over two or three days (two being the most popular), with each team playing three round games the first day and three final or play-off games the second day.

The World Series, which originated in 1999 is run by World Rugby and has been growing in popularity, especially with the debut of Sevens in the 2016 Rio Olympics. The World Series runs from December to May or June and consists of 6 tournaments for the females and 12 tournaments for the men, and is played all around the world in a different country each tournament.

Games can be separated by a minimum of 2 hours but can be up to 5 hours depending on how many teams are competing. Despite the short game time, most teams will warm up for at least 20 minutes for each game at a high intensity which needs to be considered nutritionally.

The pre-season for Sevens varies in lengths with some club teams training together once or twice per week for 4-6 weeks leading up to a tournament with their primary sport being Rugby 15's. Professional teams have a pre-season lasting for 8-10 weeks where players primarily work on their match fitness and body composition.

The physiological demands on a Sevens player is quite high due to the intensity and speed of the game combined with the tournament format of 6 games in 2 days. Players cover on average 1.4-1.6km in a round game and 2.2-2.4km in a final – mostly at high speed.

Due to style and speed of the game the body composition all players have to be quick, agile and lean with no big difference between positions.

## TRAINING DIET

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

The training diet for a Rugby Sevens player should be healthy and varied as well as provide sufficient carbohydrate to meet daily fuel needs. Adequate protein to meet daily needs and assist muscle repair is also important. Fruit and vegetables are essential for their overall health and immunity – especially at the elite level where extensive travel to different countries adds stress to immune function.

The training diet typically includes carbohydrate rich meals and snacks in and around training as well as incorporating protein sources at each meal and snacks after each session. Female athletes have a high iron requirement so ensuring adequate high iron sources as snacks and meals is essential for these athletes and should be considered.

## FLUID NEEDS

Fluid requirements vary for each player depending on their sweat rate, sweat composition and ability to tolerate fluid during sport. However, due to the short nature of the game, hydration is a low risk during tournaments as players have adequate time to rehydrate between games and often use only sips during games due to the intensity.

During pre-season, leading into summer, the fluid intake during training is more likely to result in hydration issues. Dehydration results in fatigue, loss of concentration and difficulty with decision making. All of these skills are essential during Rugby Sevens games and training, especially when one error often leads to the opposition scoring due to the speed of the game.

This just requires athletes to be educated on how much they should be drinking during training sessions and how to accurately rehydrate after training sessions and games. Sports drinks can be useful during training and matches. In between matches sports drinks help rehydrate the players faster, while the carbohydrate content provided assist with player's fuel their high intensities during training and games.

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## EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

It's important to start tournaments well-fuelled. Since Sevens competition takes place in a tournament format, the last meal before matches start is usually breakfast 2-3 hours before their first game. Players should also aim to eat a small carbohydrate snack in the hour before each game and many athletes are very specific about what this food is so they feel prepared for matches.

It is important that players alternate these snacks between sweet and savory as they have a lot more small snacks when playing Sevens and you don't want athletes to have flavour fatigue. High fat foods should be avoided on game day, as they may not empty sufficiently prior to each game. Typical pre-game snacks include:

- Fruit
- Muesli bar
- Half a sandwich
- Trail mix
- Pretzels
- Milk tetra packs

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

The most important nutritional strategy during tournaments for Rugby Sevens players is their recovery between games, especially if they only have a short break. They need to start the recovery process as soon as possible after each game to replenish glucose stores for the next games. Popular snacks between games include:

- 'Protein sports drinks' that include carbohydrates
- Flavoured milk tetras
- Smoothies
- Fresh fruit
- Dried fruit and nut mix
- Simple sandwiches (e.g. cheese and vegemite)

The timing of lunch is dependent on the gaps between games, so it is really important that breakfast is substantial on the day of competitions in case lunch isn't possible until mid afternoon.

At the professional level, lunches are provided on-site at the stadium, but for junior tournaments athletes often have to cater for themselves. Sandwiches with protein and salad plus some fruit and nuts is a simple healthy option.

## RECOVERY

Due to such varied recovery times, it varies how much each player will feel like eating between games. If players have lost their appetite due to the strenuous nature of game, plus the physical contact involved carbohydrates and fluid becomes the priority. If they can tolerate a little bit more the liquid recovery options such as protein drinks, smoothies or flavoured milks are often the next choice. Between longer breaks, food is always encouraged but keep it small and frequent rather than a large meal between games.

Suggestions for suitable recovery snacks include:

- Flavoured milk drinks
- Fruit smoothie made with milk or coconut water
- Nut bars
- Low fat banana bread or fruit muffins
- Trail mix
- Homemade oat based protein balls
- Fresh fruit
- Yoghurt pouches

## OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

- **Supplements** should only be used in conjunction with advice from experts such as Accredited Sports Dietitians. Some have been shown to be effective to enhance performance such as Sports Drinks, Sports Gels and Caffeine. Other supplements may be used by players due to perceived benefit (players feel better) as opposed to proven benefit.
- **Plan ahead** Players should have snacks ready to go at the stadium as it can be difficult to rely on the venue to provide appropriate choices.