



NUTRITION FOR SOCCER PLAYERS: WHAT TO EAT WHEN

AMY DIRKS ([HTTPS://WWW.SOCCERTODAY.COM/AUTHOR/AMY/](https://www.soccertoday.com/author/amy/)) - FEBRUARY 24, 2019

Amy Dirks on Nutrient Timing for Sports

Nutrition information for soccer players from Amy Dirks. Discover what makes this column so different: [Read SoccerToday's Interview with Amy Dirks \(https://www.soccertoday.com/amy-dirks-on-real-nutrition-impacts-elite-soccer-players-of-all-ages/\)](https://www.soccertoday.com/amy-dirks-on-real-nutrition-impacts-elite-soccer-players-of-all-ages/)

Soccer players of all ages are always looking for nutrition advice and valuable tips for what to eat for peak performance. Here is Amy Dirks' latest column on Going Nuts for Nuts. Have a nutrition question? [Ask Amy \(http://mailto:AskAmy@News@SoccerToday.com\)](mailto:AskAmy@News@SoccerToday.com)! Just email us your question and we will see if we can answer it in an upcoming article on great nutrition ideas for soccer players!

NUTRITION FOR SOCCER PLAYERS: When is the best time to eat?

When Should Soccer Players Fuel Up? For many youth soccer coaches, soccer parents and players — this has to be one of the most asked questions.

The familiar question, “What’s for dinner” takes on new meaning when fueling an athlete who wants to reach peak performance.



When is the best time to fuel up? What should players eat and when?

A failure to plan is a plan to fail

Although I cannot speak for all elite athletes, I would assume that most have a routine they follow the night before and the day of an event and that you wouldn’t find them just “winging it” when it comes to food and hydration.

FOOD IS THE MEDICINE THAT FUELS PERFORMANCE.

If you are carb-loading or fueling up on processed foods that come from a bag or box, you are potentially decreasing energy, speed, ground covered, and overall performance. Not to mention, potential weight gain, slower recovery, and weaker immunity.

When in doubt, use the concept of 3's *every 3* (all three macronutrients; healthy **carbohydrates**, lean **protein**, and healthy fats every three hours).

By doing so, you ensure that you are taking in the appropriate amounts of nutrients to fuel your activity. Remember to choose whole foods that nourish the body and work synergistically for you.



Youth Soccer News – What is the correct TIME FOR FOOD? Nutrition information for soccer players

IN REGARDS TO HYDRATING, CRAMPING IS USUALLY DUE TO A LACK OF PREPARATION.

Always drink at least 2 glasses of water upon waking. We tend to dehydrate while we sleep so drinking as soon as you wake, sets the tone for the day. Add a lemon slice for extra Vitamin C and to gently detox the liver. Continue hydrating throughout the day by drinking ~2 cups of water every 1.5-2 hours. Half of your body weight in ounces is the general rule but this could vary according to physical activity and sweat rate.

Without getting too scientific, there are those athletes that are so metabolically efficient, they can change energy systems from burning sugar (glucose) for energy to fat (ketones) for energy. These athletes do not usually “bonk” when they have depleted all of their glycogen stores because they have trained their bodies to use fat as a fuel. For those athletes choosing to eat more healthy fats and less carbohydrates, their pre-game plan may look a little different from the athlete that relies on carbohydrates as their fuel source.

Note 4 hours prior to play for pre-game and those choices may depend upon playing time and older youth players and adults can have caffeine 30 min before the event.

Here are the answers:

Advice for Soccer Players' Pre-Game Meal

Pre-Game Meal: This meal should be your largest of the day and should include plenty of carbs, a decent amount of protein, and a little healthy fat (ghee, oils/dressings, avocados).



Examples of great pre-game meals for soccer players could be...

- Grilled chicken (4-5 oz.), baked sweet potato/regular potato, ~1 cup roasted vegetables
- Grilled fish (checkbook size), steamed brown rice (1 cup or 1-2 fists), ~ 1 cup roasted vegetables
- Baked salmon, quinoa (1 cup or 1-2 fists), spinach side salad, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pineapple
- Oatmeal (1-2 cups), toppings of choice (nuts, dried fruit, flax, almond milk, cinnamon), fruit salad (1 cup), 4 oz. OJ
- Egg omelet or frittata with veggies (spinach, onions/mushrooms, sweet potatoes/potatoes in omelet/frittata or on the side), side of melons (1 cup) or berries
- Granola with almond milk & banana/berries or Greek yogurt w/ granola & berries (try plain greek and add almond butter and honey or maple syrup)
- Rosemary lime chicken with sweet potato fries and kale salad

- Nutty Fruit & Cream; strawberries/blueberries in a cereal bowl topped with raisins and almonds; pour almond milk over top and eat like cereal
- Taco bowl with ground chicken, spices, corn, lettuce/veggies, and brown rice
- Baked potato (sweet potato) loaded with chicken, steamed veggies, avocado
- Sweet potato hash (sweet potato, veggies/onions, fried or poached eggs)

Advice for Soccer Players' Pre-Game Snack – What to Eat to Top Off:

Soccer players can have a snack 1-2 hours before the event to top off your fuel stores. Make this mostly carbohydrates with a little protein and make sure it's a familiar food that you know you digest well.



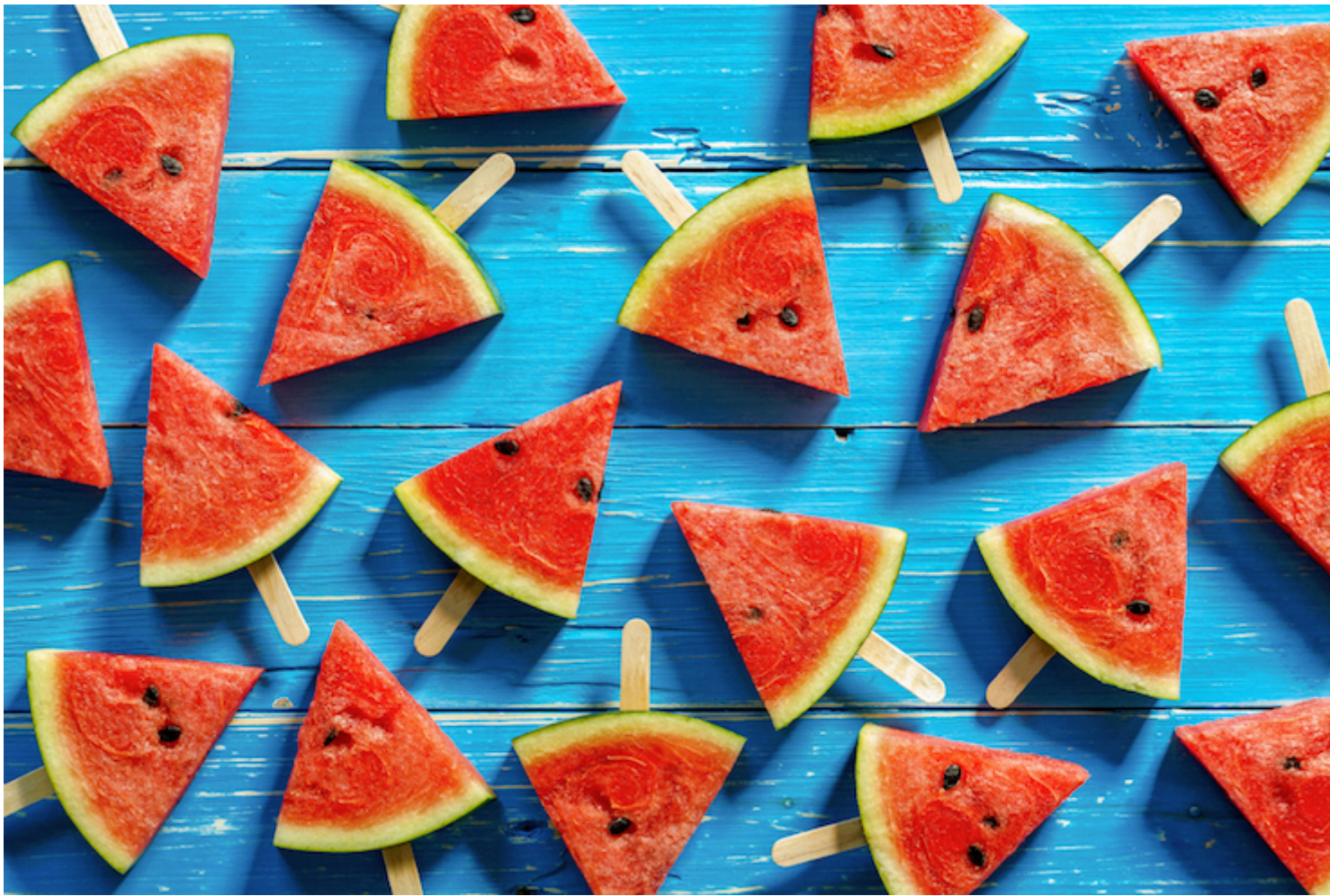
Examples of these snacks could be...

- Make your own trail mix; dried pineapple, dried mangos, dates, almonds, coconut flakes, dried bananas, jerky, sea salt or try dried cherries/cranberries, walnuts, almonds, pistachios, dark chocolate, and pumpkin seeds.
- Smoothies
- Frozen grapes and a handful of nuts or piece of turkey
- Banana or apple with almond butter and granola sprinkled (drizzle honey)

- Applesauce with collagen protein powder mixed in
- Orange or fruit of choice with cottage cheese or yogurt and nuts
- Kize, Lara, Kind Pressed Bars
- All fruit bars with a handful of nuts
- Gluten-free pretzels with yogurt dip or hummus if tolerated well
- 2 protein/energy balls

Advice on What Soccer Players' Should Eat to Reload:

Reload during the game and at halftime with carbs, electrolytes, and fluids to power you through the remaining game. A small snack can delay fatigue and help with recovery.



Examples of these foods could be...

- Sports gels (can make your own as well with quality ingredients); use 2 Tbs. honey, 2 Tbs. almond butter, ½ banana, and 1 tsp lemon juice
- Oranges/orange slices
- Electrolyte drinks
- Coconut water
- Homemade sports drink

- ½ bar (fruit bar, date bar like Lara bar)
- Applesauce packets or baby food packets
- Frozen grapes
- Watermelon slices
- Elete drops (electrolyte drops) or Drip Drop
- Dates

Advice on What Soccer Players' Should Eat to Refuel Immediately After the Game:

Refuel immediately following the match, you should have a recovery snack (within 15-20 minutes ideally). Make this a mix of carbs and protein to replenish your fuel stores (glycogen) and repair damaged tissue. Always follow up with an actual meal within an hour after your recovery snack.



Examples of recovery snacks could be...

- Kind, Lara, Rx bars
- Protein/energy balls
- Veggies and hummus or yogurt dip
- Fruit with nuts or nut butter or yogurt dip
- Trail mix
- Ready to drink protein (such as Orgain)
- Organic cottage cheese w/ fruit (if you have dairy)
- Chia pudding
- Smoothies; add grass-fed protein powder or vegan
- Gluten free wrap (such as Siete Almond Flour Tortillas) w/ nut butter and fruit or with roast beef and ground mustard for example
- Deli meat (no nitrate) lettuce wrap
- Tomato/olive/fresh mozzarella skewers
- Fruit salad with coconut milk drizzled (could add nuts or seeds/dried coconut)
- Overnight oats; oats and almond milk in a jar overnight; in the morning, add nuts/seeds, fruit, cinnamon, vanilla, etc.
- Pancakes w/ eggs, cinnamon, and banana; add almond butter or peanut butter after cooking
- Egg “muffins”
- Avocado on gluten-free toast



Side note: 70% of your immune system is in your gut and sugar feeds those bad bacteria and yeast so think about what you are fueling with when it comes to carbohydrates!



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