

EAT



TO

COMPETE

A Coach's Quick Guide to Fueling Athletes for Performance



Why Nutrition Matters

As coaches, we spend hours perfecting training plans, refining technique, and building team culture. But one of the most powerful performance tools is often overlooked: nutrition.

What athletes eat—and when they eat it—directly impacts energy, focus, recovery, and long-term development. Yet most young athletes have never been taught the basics of fueling for sport.

This guide gives you practical, evidence-based strategies to help your athletes perform better, recover faster, and build habits that last a lifetime.

"Training creates the stimulus. Nutrition determines how well athletes adapt."

Coaches Influence More Than Performance

 Performance

 Recovery

 Growth

 Focus

 Confidence

 Healthy Habits

The 8 Great Mistakes

Even well-intentioned coaches can unknowingly allow nutrition habits that undermine their athletes' performance, recovery, and development. These eight common mistakes are easy to spot—and even easier to fix once you know what to look for.

1



SKIPPING BREAKFAST

Low energy.
Slower start.

2



POOR HYDRATION

Fatigue before
practice begins.

3



NOT EATING BEFORE PRACTICE

Reduced intensity
and focus.

4



IGNORING RECOVERY NUTRITION

Slower
recovery.

5



TOO MUCH PROCESSED FOOD

Less quality
fuel.

6



PROTEIN ONLY AT DINNER

Missed opportunities
for muscle repair.

7



RELYING ON SUPPLEMENTS

Food should be
the foundation.

8



NOT EATING ENOUGH OVERALL

Performance suffers
when energy is too low.

The good news? Each of these mistakes has a simple, practical fix that any coach can implement—starting today. The following pages break down each mistake with actionable strategies.

01



Skipping Breakfast

Why It Matters

Athletes who skip breakfast start the day in an energy deficit, leading to poor focus, sluggish performance, and poor growth.

Coach Tip

Ask athletes each morning: 'What did you eat for breakfast?' Make it a team expectation, not optional.

Quick Win

Share a list of 5 quick breakfast ideas athletes can prep in under 3 minutes.

02



Poor Hydration

Why It Matters

Even 2% dehydration reduces reaction time, endurance, and decision-making. Most athletes show up to practice already dehydrated.

Coach Tip

Require water bottles at every session. Build drink breaks into practice structure, not just when athletes ask.

Quick Win

Start practice with a hydration check: 'Show me your water bottle. Is it half gone already?'

03



Not Eating Before Practice

Why It Matters

Training on empty means less energy output, more muscle breakdown, and higher injury risk. The body needs fuel to perform.

Coach Tip

Set a team rule: eat a snack 1-2 hours before practice. Provide examples that are easy and portable.

Quick Win

Post a 'Pre-Practice Fuel' list in the locker room with 5 simple grab-and-go options.

04



Ignoring Recovery Nutrition

Why It Matters

The 15-30 minute window after training is critical for glycogen replenishment to invest in the next training or competition. Missing it slows adaptation.

Coach Tip

Build a post-practice routine: cool down, stretch, eat. Make recovery nutrition part of the team culture.

Quick Win

Keep simple recovery snacks available after practice—chocolate milk, fruit, or granola bars.

05



Too Much Processed Food

Why It Matters

Processed foods are high in sodium, sugar, and empty calories. They displace nutrient-dense foods athletes need for energy and recovery.

Coach Tip

Teach the 80/20 rule: aim for 80% whole foods, 20% flexibility. Help athletes identify simple swaps.

Quick Win

Challenge athletes to swap one processed snack for a whole-food option this week.

06



Protein Only at Dinner

Why It Matters

Muscle repair happens all day. Loading protein at one meal wastes potential—balancing protein intake throughout the day provides a steady stream of amino acids to maximize muscle growth and repair.

Coach Tip

Encourage protein at every meal and snack. Share examples: eggs at breakfast, yogurt at lunch, nuts after school.

Quick Win

Ask athletes to add one protein source to breakfast or lunch this week.

07



Relying on Supplements

Why It Matters

Supplements are unregulated, often unnecessary, and can contain banned substances. Real food should always come first for young athletes.

Coach Tip

Have a clear team policy: no supplements without parent and medical approval. Focus conversations on food first.

Quick Win

Replace one supplement conversation with a 'food first' alternative this week.

08



Not Eating Enough Overall

Why It Matters

Growing athletes have enormous energy needs. Under-eating leads to fatigue, frequent illness, stress fractures, and stunted development.

Coach Tip

Watch for signs: constant fatigue, frequent injuries, mood changes, or declining performance despite good training.

Quick Win

Share the message: 'You can't out-train a poor diet—and you can't perform on too little fuel.'

When to Fuel and Meal Ideas

- ✓ Eat at least 3 balanced meals a day
- ✓ Top off the tank 2 hours before training or competition
- ✓ Refuel 15–30 minutes after training or competition
- ✓ Avoid going 5 hours or more without eating



Fueling 5-12 Hours Before Competition or Practice

The meals athletes eat throughout the day have a greater impact on performance than the snack they eat just before competition.

BREAKFAST IDEAS

Oatmeal with berries & nuts

Scrambled eggs, whole-grain toast & fruit

Vegetable Omelet and whole grain toast

Greek yogurt parfait with granola & berries

Powercakes Pancakes or Waffles with Fresh berries & milk

Large bowl of hot or cold cereal with milk & sliced banana or berries

Breakfast sandwich with egg, lean ham, avocado on whole grain bagel, bread or tortilla

Left-overs from dinner

LUNCH/DINNER IDEAS

Turkey sandwich on whole-grain bread with fruit

Grilled chicken, brown rice & vegetables

Whole grain pasta with meat sauce and salad

Grilled chicken sandwich or wrap and a salad

Rice or potatoes with meat and vegetables

Vegetable soup and a sandwich

Baked fish with quinoa or farro and roasted vegetables

Tacos with rice and beans

Stir-fry with your choice of protein, vegetables and rice

Coach's Takeaway

Athletes don't "fuel" just before practice. Great performance is built through consistent meals eaten throughout the day. Encourage athletes to think about nutrition as part of training—not separate from it.

Fueling Timeline for Performance



2 Hours Before Activity

Goal: Top off the tank

- Peanut butter and banana sandwich
- Low Fat Yogurt
- Baked pita chips and hummus
- Turkey Wrap
- Bowl of Soup
- Bagel with Laughing cow cheese
- Pretzels and a Cheese Stick
- Small bowl of cereal (low sugar)
- Glass of low fat milk
- Peanut butter and banana or apple slices
- Trail mix (no candy)
- Granola bar (low sugar)
- Apple Sauce
- Pineapple and low fat cottage cheese
- Wheat crackers and low fat cheese
- Any fruit



Keep snacks light and familiar before competition.



15-30 minutes Post Event

Goal: Replace Glycogen Stores

- Chocolate Milk
- Trail mix (with candy)
- Smoothie with fruit and a protein (Milk, yogurt, protein powder)
- Peanut butter and Jelly sandwich (extra jelly)
- Protein Bar (must contain carbohydrates)
- Sports Drink or Juice with protein powder



2-3 hours Post Event

Goal: Repeat a balanced meal for steady stream of carbohydrates, proteins and healthy fats.

THE ATHLETE FUELING JOURNEY

Fuel Smart. Perform Strong. Recover Well.



5-12 HOURS BEFORE ACTIVITY

Goal: Build energy stores and prepare your body.

WHAT TO EAT

- Balanced meals with carbohydrates, lean protein, healthy fats, and fluids
- Focus on whole foods your body knows
- Don't skip meals
- Hydrate consistently



2 HOURS BEFORE ACTIVITY

Goal: Top off the tank with familiar foods.

WHAT TO EAT

- Light, easy-to-digest meals or snacks
- Low in fat and fiber
- Focus on carbohydrates for energy
- Keep portions moderate



DURING ACTIVITY (60+ MINUTES)

Goal: Maintain energy and hydration.

WHAT TO DO

- Drink fluids consistently
- Use carbohydrates for fuel if activity is long or intense
- Small, simple, and easy to digest



15-30 MINUTES AFTER ACTIVITY

Goal: Replenish, repair, and recover.

WHAT TO EAT

- Include carbohydrates and protein
- Rehydrate
- Start recovery within 30 minutes
- Refuel again in 2-3 hours with a balanced meal

Coach's Sideline Nutrition Cheat Sheet

Simple reminders that help athletes train, recover, and perform at their best.

BEFORE PRACTICE

- ✓ Eat a balanced meal 3 times per day.
- ✓ Eat a light-carbohydrate-rich snack 1-2 hours before practice.
- ✓ Begin practice well hydrated.

DURING PRACTICE OR COMPETITION

- ✓ Drink water regularly.
- ✓ Longer practices or tournaments may require additional carbohydrates.
- ✓ Encourage consistent hydration—not just when athletes feel thirsty.
- ✓ Tournament days require fueling between games.

AFTER PRACTICE

- ✓ Refuel within 15-30 minutes.
- ✓ Include both carbohydrates and protein.
- ✓ Continue drinking fluids after activity.
- ✓ Recovery starts immediately—not when athletes get home.

SMART SNACKS

 Banana
 String cheese
 Granola bar

 Greek yogurt
 Pretzels
 Turkey wrap

 Trail mix
 PB sandwich
 Fruit smoothie

 Apple
 Chocolate milk
 Cottage cheese & fruit

COACH REMINDERS

- ☐ Fueling is part of training.
- ☐ Food first. Supplements second.
- ☐ Consistency beats perfection.
- ☐ Model healthy habits.
- ☐ Encourage—not police—nutrition.
- ☐ Every athlete deserves access to quality nutrition education.

Great Coaching Doesn't End With Training.

It includes helping athletes recover, grow, and perform through smart nutrition.

Locker-Room Nutrition Poster

Simple reminders that help you train, recover, and perform at your best.

THE 8 NUTRITION MISTAKES THAT **QUIETLY** COST ATHLETES PERFORMANCE

Small nutrition mistakes create big performance consequences.

1



SKIPPING BREAKFAST

Low energy.
Slower start.

2



POOR HYDRATION

Fatigue before
practice begins.

3



NOT EATING BEFORE PRACTICE

Reduced intensity
and focus.

4



IGNORING RECOVERY NUTRITION

Slower
recovery.

5



TOO MUCH PROCESSED FOOD

Less quality
fuel.

6



PROTEIN ONLY AT DINNER

Missed opportunities
for muscle repair.

7



RELYING ON SUPPLEMENTS

Food should be
the foundation.

8



NOT EATING ENOUGH OVERALL

Performance suffers
when energy is too low.

THE ATHLETE FUELING JOURNEY

Fuel Smart. Perform Strong. Recover Well.



5-12 HOURS BEFORE ACTIVITY

Goal: Build energy stores
and prepare your body.

WHAT TO EAT

- Balanced meals with carbohydrates, lean protein, healthy fats, and fluids
- Focus on whole foods your body knows
- Don't skip meals
- Hydrate consistently



2 HOURS BEFORE ACTIVITY

Goal: Top off the tank
with familiar foods.

WHAT TO EAT

- Light, easy-to-digest meals or snacks
- Low in fat and fiber
- Focus on carbohydrates for energy
- Keep portions moderate



DURING ACTIVITY (60+ MINUTES)

Goal: Maintain energy
and hydration.

WHAT TO DO

- Drink fluids consistently
- Use carbohydrates for fuel if activity is long or intense
- Small, simple, and easy to digest



15-30 MINUTES AFTER ACTIVITY

Goal: Replenish, repair,
and recover.

WHAT TO EAT

- Include carbohydrates and protein
- Rehydrate
- Start recovery within 30 minutes
- Refuel again in 2-3 hours with a balanced meal

Locker-Room Hydration Poster

Simple reminders that help you train, recover, and perform at your best.

HYDRATION PEE CHART

Use your pee color as a simple check to see how hydrated you are.

1		CLEAR / VERY LIGHT YELLOW GOOD You are well hydrated.		KEEP IT UP! Continue drinking water throughout the day.
2		LIGHT YELLOW GOOD You are hydrated.		YOU'RE GOOD. Keep drinking water regularly to stay on track.
3		YELLOW FAIR You are starting to get dehydrated.		DRINK SOON. Increase your water intake in the next hour.
4		DARK YELLOW DEHYDRATED You need more fluids.		DRINK NOW. Drink water and electrolytes to rehydrate.
5		AMBER VERY DEHYDRATED You are low on fluids.		REHYDRATE. Drink water and electrolytes immediately.
6		DARK AMBER / GOLD SEVERELY DEHYDRATED You need to rehydrate now.		TAKE ACTION. Rehydrate immediately and seek medical attention if needed.

5 WAYS TO **STAY HYDRATED** ALL DAY LONG

1



CARRY A BIG WATER BOTTLE

Keep it with you all day. Out of sight, out of mind.

 Goal: Refill it 2-3 times a day.

2



DRINK FROM A STRAW

Straws can help you drink more water, more often.

 Small sips add up!

3



TRACK IT

Use a water bottle with time markers or an app to stay on track.

 Consistency is key.

4



EAT YOUR WATER

Fruits and veggies like watermelon, oranges, and cucumbers help hydrate your body.

 Hydration comes from more than drinks!

5



SET REMINDERS

Use alarms or phone reminders to drink water throughout the day.

 Your body needs it—don't wait until you're thirsty!