



Kid Athlete Fueling and Hydration Tips

My name is Stephanie Mull and I am a sports dietitian who works at the GWU Weight Management Lab in Ashburn. My son, Nathan (#6), is on the U9 team. I offered to create this fueling and hydrating tip sheet so we can get the most out of our players this season!

If kids eat inconsistently and/or ate poorly the day of a game, fatigue can set in early on during the game. You'll see performance suffer with decreased energy and power with sloppy skills and slowed reactions. You can't force a kid to eat if they aren't hungry for it. However if you see this type of performance, an immediate solution is to offer some quick fueling options. The long-term solution is to discuss with your athlete the importance of regular, balanced, nutritious eating of meals and snacks. The mid-game snack needs to be mostly carbohydrate (or sugar!). The reason is because carbohydrate is the body's source of quick energy. Child athletes cannot regulate their use of carbohydrate during exercise as well as adults can. This means they need to ingest it regularly throughout the day and especially during their games.

In-game Fueling: (goal is 15-30 grams of total carbohydrate per game; minimal fat)

- Honey packets
- Fruit snacks
- Fruit strips
- Gummy bears or worms
- Dried fruit (raisins, mango, etc.)
- Graham crackers or pretzels
- Fruit squeezable packs

Post-game snacks should also have more carbohydrate but can include some protein without a lot of fat for a more nutritious balance.

Post-Game Nourishment:

- Greek yogurt tubes with a serving or small bag of pretzels or crackers
- Gorp (mix of chocolate chips, dry cereal of choice like Cheerios or Chex, dried fruit of choice)
- Fresh fruit and string cheese
- Granola bars (thinkKIDS now makes a really good one that is nutritiously balanced!)
- Mini bagels
- Mini muffins (Costco sells tasty ones)

Hydration:

- Without going into too much detail, kids should drink at least 16 oz. of water per hour of activity. Water is the optimal beverage during and post-game. If your child is prone to cramping or if it is very hot or humid outside, then a sports drink could be beneficial.
- Active children need to eat often to fuel their smaller bodies for physical activity. A small meal or snack every 3–4 hours is a good rule of thumb. Pay particular attention to pre-exercise snacks to help provide fuel for physical activity, as well as the post-exercise snack and/or meal to help speed recovery. You can reinforce the message of Food is Fuel at home by discussing these concepts with your children.

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