

Nutrition

Fact Sheet

Fueling the School-Aged Athlete – Food to Go

School-aged athletes may find themselves in a variety of situations where food to go is a necessity. For example:

- a school-aged athlete may need to go to practice immediately after school,
- sports teams may have to travel to compete with another school, and
- some school-aged athletes may be involved in all-day tournaments or have multiple heats or games that are closely spaced.

Food may not be available, time may be limited, or the type of food offered at the concession stand may not be appropriate. A number of unexpected circumstances could affect food intake, behavior, and eventually performance (Habash, 2006).

Food Resources

Coaches, parents, and anyone responsible for providing food for school-aged athletes need to plan ahead. Meals and snacks may be required before, during, and after athletic events.

Depending on meal timing, certain foods may have a more desirable nutrient content.

Determine what food resources are needed and what is available, then plan for meals and pack healthy drinks and foods accordingly. School nutrition staff will work with coaches to provide appropriate foods for school-aged athletes.



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There are a number of things to consider when planning meals.

- Meals should be high in complex carbohydrates that are quickly digested and absorbed.
- A snack during exercise may be appropriate. Some benefits have been shown by consuming carbohydrates every hour as solid food or drink for long events (American Dietetic Association [ADA], 2009; McArdle, Katch, & Katch, 2008). Concentrated carbohydrates found in sport drinks, gels, and bars can be useful to support energy intake during training and competition (Meyer, O'Connor, & Shirreffs, 2007). Commercial sports foods may be convenient, but traditional sports foods like bananas, water, or chocolate milk work just as well for less money and better taste (Clark, 2008).
- Meals should provide nutrient-rich carbohydrate foods and a good source of protein (Burke, Keins, & Ivy, 2004).
- Plain water is a preferred fluid and should be consumed throughout the day especially before, during, and after exercise (ADA, 2009).



Food on the Road

School-aged athletes traveling to athletic events can either pack food to go or purchase food at restaurants. Whoever is in charge of feeding the athletes should investigate food resources available on the travel route. Good choices include

- family style restaurants offering a variety of complex carbohydrate menu items,
- fast food restaurants offering healthier options,
- local delis that feature whole-grain breads and hearty soups, and
- foodservice operations willing to modify the way menu items are prepared and offer substitutions.

Based on their personal experience, school-aged athletes should choose familiar foods that are well tolerated. After competition, they can experiment with new foods when the risk of having an unsettled stomach would not affect performance.

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When Eating Out Choose This	Instead of This
Egg and English muffin	Sausage and egg biscuit
Pancakes	Cinnamon bun
Hot or cold cereal	Breakfast pastry
Lowfat muffin	Doughnut
Bagel, lowfat cream cheese	Croissant
Grilled chicken finger	Fried chicken nuggets
Plain baked potato	Loaded baked potato
Pasta with tomato sauce	Pasta with cream sauce (Alfredo)
Broth, bean, or vegetable soup	Cream soups and chowders
Plain steamed rice	Fried rice
Lowfat milk	Soft drinks

Tips for Healthier Meals When Dining Out

- Choose baked, grilled, roasted, broiled, steamed, or stir-fried food with no added fat.
- Select lean meat, fish, and poultry; and do not eat skin or fat.
- Order thick crust pizza with lots of vegetables and avoid extra cheese, sausage, Pepperoni, and meat; blot off fat from the cheese with a napkin.
- Select a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables and avoid added butter, cream sauces, and cheese toppings.
- Choose sandwiches with hearty slices of whole-grain bread and smaller amounts of filling; select light dressings instead of mayonnaise or special high-fat sauce.
- Build healthy salads by selecting a variety of nutrient dense, dark green and orange vegetables; include protein by adding flaked tuna, sliced turkey, chickpeas, beans, or nuts; add calcium with lowfat cheese, plain yogurt dressings, or lowfat cottage cheese. Ask for salad dressing to be served on the side and use sparingly. Limit whole fat cheeses, high-fat croutons, and bacon bits.

Food at the Sporting Event

Find out what type of food is available at a sporting event. Bring enough food to last the entire day for tournaments or situations where you may not be able to leave and have a meal. Pack plenty of carbohydrate rich snacks. Some school-aged athletes are more comfortable eating small frequent snacks rather than a larger meal when they are competing.

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Make sure there is an ample supply of fresh, cool, good tasting water. If not, plan to bring individual water bottles, bottled water, or water coolers. Sports drinks are only needed under certain circumstances such as long endurance events lasting longer than an hour.



Source: Food Safety Mini-Posters: Keep Hot Foods Hot! Keep Cold Foods Cold!, 2000.

Food Safety

Keep food out of the danger zone of 41–135 °F where bacteria grow rapidly (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2005). Food should not be left in the danger zone for more than 2 hours; however, when the outside temperature is greater than 90 °F the limit is 1 hour. If food is left out longer than the recommended time, throw it away to be safe. If keeping cold food cold and hot food hot is not possible, take foods that do not need refrigeration or heat.

Tips for Transporting and Holding Food

- Use a cooler with ice or gel packs.
- Place a thermometer in the cooler. It should be 41°F or lower.
- Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.
- Place food in water-proof containers or wrap and completely immerse in the ice inside the cooler. If using gel packs, place them between food packages.
- Keep cooler closed; place in the shade or cover with a blanket.
- Transport food inside the vehicle rather than in a car trunk or luggage compartment.
- Use a separate cooler for drinks because it will be opened and closed frequently.
- Eat perishable food first.
- Pre-wash fruit and vegetables including the outer rinds of melons and other fruits and vegetables that could be contaminated with bacteria.
- Remind school-aged athletes to wash their hands before eating. If that is not possible, use moist towelettes or a hand sanitizer.
- Protect all food from dirt and insects.

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Food to Go Suggestions

Fresh fruit*	Peanut butter sandwiches
Carrots*	Dried fruit-raisins, pineapple, apricots
Meat or cheese sandwiches*	Nuts
Yogurt*	Unopened cans of meat, fish, or fruit
String cheese*	Crackers, pretzels
Lowfat milk*	Dry cereal, granola bars
Pudding*	Juice boxes

*Keep cold

- Keeping school-aged athletes fueled with food and hydrated with drinks in various sports venues requires planning.
- Find out if healthy food options are available on the road and at the event.
- Pack food and beverages that are well tolerated by the competing athlete.
- Remember to follow good food safety practices. Keep hot food hot and cold food cold!



For More Information

American Dietetic Association. www.eatright.org

Best Beverage Bets. www.opi.mt.gov

Bottled Water Basics. www.epa.gov

Food and Nutrition Service. Nutrition Education Resources. www.fns.usda.gov

Nutrition for Everyone: Basics: Water. www.cdc.gov

MyPyramid for Kids. www.mypyramid.gov

SCAN–Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutritionists – A Practice Group of the American Dietetic Association. www.scandpg.org

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center For Food Safety And Applied Nutrition. Eating Outdoors, Handling Food Safely.

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For more information, contact NFSMI at 800-321-3054 or www.nfsmi.org.

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