

# Healthy Diet for Soccer Players

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A healthy diet can only affect your performance in the long-term, while eating the wrong things can degrade it rather easily. Make sure you mainly consume carbohydrate-rich meals two to three days before an upcoming match. It is recommended to stay away from fried, fatty or spicy foods within 24 hours of kick-off. To empty out the stomach and upper small intestine, your pre-game meal should be 3-4 hours prior to the match. From that point on, stick to liquids, juices and light snacks. Make sure you are well hydrated because that can affect your performance dramatically. Drink plenty of fluids before, after and (when possible) during the game. Eat a large meal consisting primarily of complex carbohydrates within three hours after the game's completion. Throughout the rest of the week, you may eat protein (meats) but try to keep it low-fat. The basic idea is to have your body store its calories from carbohydrate foods. Players burn approximately 1700 calories per game while the body can only store about 600 per day.

Here are some examples of low-fat, high-carb foods that you may consider:

## **Breakfast & Snacks**

- non-sugar coated cereal
- cold or hot cereals (oatmeal)
- soy or low-fat milk
- English muffins
- pancakes
- French toast
- potatoes
- yogurt
- bagels
- juices
- fresh or dried fruit
- sandwiches
- yogurt

- corn
- pretzels
- low-fat cottage cheese
- graham crackers
- egg whites

### **Lunch & Dinner**

- fish (seafood)
- veal
- chicken (without the skin)
- turkey
- other lean meats (not fried)
- rice
- vegetables
- pasta (marinara sauce)
- variety of breads (multi-grain)
- soups (broths are best with a little onion)
- salads (low-fat to non-fat dressings)
- sodas (can assist with Glycogen recovery after games)
- pizza with vegetable toppings (mushrooms, green peppers)

## **Nutritional Diet for Soccer Players**

Nowadays, nutrition is a hot topic in both sports and everyday life. It must be emphasized that the weight of a soccer player is not an important factor in his performance. Instead of concentrating on reaching an ideal weight, it is wiser to work on healthy eating habits.

### **Fat**

Soccer players burn a lot of calories but fat should still be minimized in an athlete's diet, mainly because it is not an efficient provider of energy. Although there is a lot of energy stored in fat, in long duration sports, like football, the body fuels itself mainly from Glycogen (found in Carbohydrates.)

## **Carbohydrates**

As with most aerobic sports, the ideal meal for a footballer must be rich in Carbohydrates. Before matches or important events, it is recommended to increase Carb intake and decrease Proteins. Consuming meals consisting primarily of Carbohydrates has been shown to improve endurance and overall performance. Flour and starch-based foods are a good source of Carbs.

*Examples:* bread, potatoes, pasta, cereal, low-fat dairy products

## **Proteins**

Proteins are essential for the regeneration of muscles and tissue. It is important to regularly integrate Protein into meals, but the amount must be kept in small portions. In an athlete's diet, not more than 10% of all calories should come from Protein. As mentioned above, Carbs are the primary source of energy in soccer whereas Protein is simply used for cell replenishment. Pre-game meals should not contain much Protein.

*Examples:* meat, eggs, nuts

## **Water & Sports Drinks**

During matches or practice, your body will lose a lot of water. To keep it hydrated it is best to drink water (even if you don't feel like it) frequently in small portions. Many sports drinks have flooded the market in the past few years. They contain Carbohydrates and claim to potentially improve your performance. In practice, sports drinks would have the same effect as water, if the player using them has been eating right.

## References

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4. Les Reed, *The Official FA Guide to Basic Team Coaching*, (Hodder Arnold 2004).