



SMARTPLAY

Eating right for sport

Food is an important part of sport. It provides the body with the fuel it needs to perform at its best. However, if the wrong foods are consumed, injuries can result.

Fatigue is a common risk factor in many sports injuries. Fatigue makes it more difficult for your body to respond effectively to changes during play. Failure to effectively respond can lead to poor execution of a skill or movement, and unfortunately in some cases this can lead to injury.

Eating the right foods can help to reduce the onset of fatigue and assist with recovery after heavy activity.

But what foods should you eat?

Smartplay, Sports Medicine Australia's sports injury prevention program funded by VicHealth and the Department of Planning and Community Development (Sport and Recreation Victoria), recommends sporting diets should contain:

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates should form the basis of a diet as they provide energy. Energy means running faster, for longer, easier recovery and reduced fatigue. Carbohydrate intake will differ depending on the amount of exercise you do. If you are active twice a week your carbohydrate requirements will differ to if you exercise daily. Carbohydrates include rice, pasta, bread, fruit, yoghurt, milk, starchy vegetables and legumes.

Protein

Protein is important to rebuild damaged muscles, and to a small extent, is used as energy during exercise. Sources of protein are meat, chicken, fish, milk, cheese, yoghurt, nuts and eggs.

Fibre

Fibre helps regulate the rate of digestion and absorption. This slows the release of sugar from food, and therefore gives the body a steady sugar release of energy over the day. Fibre also keeps bowels regular, fills us up and helps keep the cardiovascular system healthy. Sources of fibre are wholegrain cereals, brown rice, wholemeal pasta, legumes, nuts and seeds.



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Water

Adequate fluid intake prevents muscle cramps, replaces fluids lost via sweating and controls body temperature. Drink at least two cups (500ml) an hour before activity, 150ml every 15 minutes during activity and enough to fully re-hydrate after activity.

Limited fat

Eating too much fat can mean missing out on carbohydrates. Fat is readily stored as body fat, so limiting your intake can control body fat levels and keep your heart healthy. Select low fat products, cook lean cuts of meat via a low fat method, reduce added fats and oils, and limit take away food.

Knowledge on when to eat

Eat two to three hours before activity to allow digestion and avoid experimenting with new foods before an event. Eat meals high in carbohydrates and low in fat. Also hydrate adequately.

If exercising for longer than an hour, eat carbohydrates to boost energy levels and delay fatigue.

Also refuel your body with carbohydrates and a little protein in the first 15 minutes after exercise, then again in two hours. This will aid recovery.

By following these nutrition tips your body will be fuelled with enough energy to avoid fatigue-related injuries. For further nutritional advice visit www.smartplay.com.au or see a sports dietitian.