

Fuel Your Performance By Guest Contributor: Alicia Kendig (United States Olympic Committee Sport Dietitian)

December 8, 2014 09:00 AM

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Every day, I have the pleasure of working with some of our greatest athletes, helping them fuel up to be the best in the world and represent the United States in the Olympic Games. These elite athletes use great nutrition choices to help fuel their performance. But fueling your performance shouldn't be limited to elite athletes. Nutrition is a key contributor to performance. And it's one that is often overlooked for athletes of all ages.

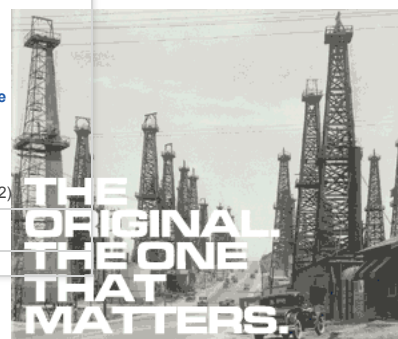
The building blocks of good nutrition start with good instincts. Starting from a young age, you probably knew not to eat certain things before a game because it might make you feel sick, or to not eat too much because it is hard to digest before the game starts. What youth athletes might not know is that certain foods can make you feel more energetic, think more clearly, and benefit performance in training and competition.

Parents and coaches can help youth athletes incorporate sports nutrition into their pre-game plans to bring out athletes' best performance. Think of food as your fuel for everything you do. Carbohydrates, Proteins, and Fats provide the energy that your body needs for both school and athletic performance. High quality forms of these foods are packaged with high quality nutrients, instead of bad nutrients. Include more of the "Good" foods, and less of the "Bad" foods in meals and snacks on a daily bases, especially on training days and game days. These high quality foods will make athletes feel better and help them perform at their best. The Bad choices can cause indigestion, low energy, inability to focus, and can actually replace foods in your diet that your body needs for recovery and preparation for future competitions. Examples of these two kinds of foods are:

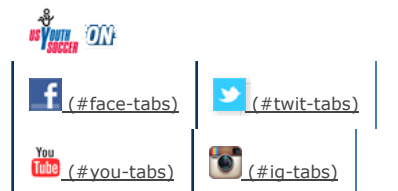
Carbohydrates	
Good	Bad
Oatmeal	French Fries
Brown Rice	Processed Crackers
Whole Grain Bread	Sugary Cereal
Fruit/Vegetables	Soda
Beans	Candy
Proteins	
Good	Bad
Chicken Breast	Fried Chicken
Eggs	High Fat Ground Meat
Fish	Fried Fish
Lean Beef	
Beans	
Nuts/Seeds	
Milk (Cows, Soy)	
Fats	
Good	Bad
Olive Oil	Margarine
Fish	Meat Fat
Nuts/Seeds	Lard
Avocado	Creamy Salad Dressings

Recently, sport nutrition products – like protein bars, protein shakes, meal replacements, and supplements – have increased in popularity amongst athletes for both convenience and perceived performance benefits. Don't let these products cheat your athlete out of consuming nutrient-dense meals and snacks. Pre- and post-game meals should contain many of the "Good" foods listed, and snacks should have a foundation of these same options.

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Bad nutrition choices can hold back youth athletes from performing at their best. Pay attention to the details, create a pre-game and post-game nutrition plan, and fuel-up with performance-oriented foods for training and game days.

At Liberty Mutual Insurance Play Positive™ (<http://bit.ly/1vwuquO>) we encourage parents, coaches and youth athletes alike to educate themselves by reading helpful articles such as Nutrition For Youth Athletes (<http://bit.ly/1vwtUgh>), Hydration in Athletes (<http://bit.ly/1vwtVRi>) and The Four Rs of Recovery (<http://bit.ly/1vwtVRs>). For more tips and advice for youth sports including articles, videos, podcasts, and tools from the experts, visit Play Positive Resources (<http://bit.ly/1vwtVRu>).



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Kendig holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition and a master's degree in public health nutrition from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

In an effort to benefit millions of youth athletes, parents and coaches, this article is among a series created exclusively for partners in the Liberty Mutual Insurance Play Positive™ (<http://bit.ly/1vwuquO>) program.

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