

Care And Feeding Of Your Young Athlete



When you're at the rink for a practice or a game, remember that you are what you eat.

By Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber

The hockey-playing athlete is a unique individual, and nutrition for this sport is very important. The hockey player is out for usually two minutes of sprint-like exercise. Working hard for two minutes, back on the bench for four minutes, then back out. It is an activity that requires a huge demand on the heart, lungs and large muscle groups, and necessitates action in quick spurts.

Practices several times a week and playing a couple of games a weekend can be challenging in other ways. How do you eat between games and make sure you get enough calories and nutrients without becoming slow for the next game? If your team is like ours, we have a morning game, go out for lunch, then come back for an afternoon game. Many a time the parents and coaches have commented on how slow the kids were in the game after lunch and wondered why.

Well, let's think about this for a minute. The kids have just played a game where they sprinted around for about 60 minutes or more. They come off hot and sweaty, have a drink, then go for lunch. We let them sit at a table and order what they want, or take them to the rink food place, and usually they've gotten a burger, fries and a soda. Then we expect that with all that grease, fat, caffeine and sugar, they can jump back on the ice and perform. Their bodies just say NO.

What your body needs is a combination of quick foods that can be digested easily and give you energy right now, as well as a small amount of protein that can be digested slowly and can replace some of the protein that your muscles have just lost in exercise. Proteins that are light in fat such as nuts, beans, turkey, chicken, eggs, NOT bacon, sausage, meatballs, burgers. Carbohydrates that are complex like whole wheat rolls, brown rice, and oatmeal will release their energy slowly without slowing you down. Vegetables will help to replace the key vitamins that you've used up to make energy.

And, lastly, you need fluids! Water, water, water or orange juice — you don't need PowerAde or Gatorade or other

sports drinks. Forgo the sugar and caffeine that comes with soda. This does nothing for you and can actually be detrimental to your next game. The sugar in soda gets into your bloodstream so quickly that it goes almost immediately to storage. Have you heard of the “Sugar High”? It comes within 15-30 minutes of having concentrated sugars like soda. And what about the “Sugar Low”? It comes just when you want it the least, 40-50 minutes after that sugary beverage, usually in the 3rd period of the game when you really need the extra push. The sugar ingested earlier is being pushed into storage, which then lowers your sugar level in the bloodstream. Your body then has to work extra hard to bring it back out to use as energy.

If instead you had some complex carbohydrates with lots of fiber, or protein, it would go more gradually into your system and be ready as energy when you needed it.

So, the moral of the story is this:

1) Avoid the “Energy” drinks. They are full of sugar and caffeine and will cause you to crash and burn by the end of the 2nd period.

2) Drink plenty of water on the bench and after the game. No need for the sports drinks if you drink lots of water and perhaps have a bag of pretzels — you can replace your electrolytes easily. Unless you are running a marathon, you can easily replace your fluid and electrolyte losses with water and pretzels, or a glass of OJ.

3) For quick, easily digested food or a snack, consider something like Ensure. Easily digested, has fiber, and won’t make you feel tired.

4) Low fat, good proteins and complex carbohydrates for between- game meals. For example a turkey sandwich on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato, or a bowl of vegetable soup with crackers. If you have to go to a fast food place, AVOID the fries and resist the temptation for that double burger. A burger with a side salad or apples will do more for your next game than the load of grease you’ll get with most of the other food. If you order a chicken sandwich, make it a grilled chicken sandwich and ask to not have the dressing stuff put on. It is usually a mayonnaise-based dressing that will just hold you back. Have them put on ketchup or mustard instead. Refuse the temptation to “Supersize” it. Remember, supersizing it at lunch means you’ll dog it during the game.

5) Snack on granola bars, protein bars, nuts, fruits with plenty of water handy. Eat right to play well.

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