



Five Nutritional Mistakes That Young Athlete Make Part 1 of 2

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Having worked with hundreds of young athletes over the years, I can tell you without hesitation that one of the biggest challenges kids face is getting their nutrition in order. Most have no problem going to practice, or hitting the gym in hopes of becoming a better athlete, but making the right food choices on a consistent basis is an entirely different story. To be fair, a lot of this stems from the fact that young athletes often have to make these choices while hanging out with friends, or in places where they won't necessarily have access to the types of foods, and beverages they need to keep healthy and fit. So, realizing what a slippery slope eating right can be for today's busy teens, I've put together a list of five of the biggest nutritional pitfalls that young athletes fall victim to. In reading them over, I'm sure you'll find that making a few simple changes can produce some rather noticeable results. At the very least, I hope they'll help you appreciate the tremendous impact things like eating a good breakfast, cutting down on sugar, and making sure you're properly hydrated can make.

1. Skipping, or failing to eat a proper breakfast:

You know that old axiom about breakfast being the most important meal of the day? Well, it turns out to be true, in a *big* way. Not only do kids who eat breakfast have more sustained energy throughout the day—leading to improvements in both physical *and* mental performance, but they also have a much lower risk for obesity than those who choose to forgo the morning fuel-up. In fact, one study found that teenagers who ate breakfast every day were more likely to have a healthier diet, exercise regularly and have a lower Body Mass Index (BMI) five years later compared to same age counterparts who skipped breakfast (1).

Bear in mind, however, that it's not just eating in general that brings about these numerous benefits; you have to ensure that you're consuming the right types of foods. A bowl of Cap'n Crunch and a glass of OJ for instance, might taste good and provide some quick energy, but the resultant blood sugar spike and subsequent crash it'll cause will leave you feeling sluggish for hours. You'll also want to steer clear of white breads, bagels and muffins as much as possible, as refined baked goods such as these break down into blood sugar very quickly and as a result, fail to promote a sustained energy release.

So what can today's busy young athletes grab for a quick, nutritious breakfast? Any type of whole grains, either in the form of breads, or cereals are usually a good choice. They're loaded with B vitamins and fiber, and won't cause the radical fluctuations in blood sugar levels that white flours can. As a general rule, try to look for whole grain cereals that have at least 3 grams of fiber, and no more than 10 grams of sugar per serving. In terms of breads, bagels and such, make sure that at least the first few ingredients are some type of whole grain. Often times you'll find that products that are labeled as "whole wheat", or "whole

grain" actually have very little of these ingredients in them and are more or less what I like to term "glorified white breads". Among some of the brands I do like are any of the Ezekiel breads, two from Pepperidge Farm (Natural 9 Grain and Whole Crunchy Grains) and Rubschlagler European Style Whole Grain.

Some sugars are okay as well, you just want to be careful with the amount and type that you consume. Sugar from fruit is always a good choice, just watch out for fruit juices, where the sugar concentration is much higher. I would almost always rather see a young athlete choose a piece of fruit, as opposed to say a glass of orange juice, because at least I know they're getting some fiber in as well. You should also try to consume some type of protein. After an overnight fast where your body hasn't had access to protein for several hours, providing it with this key nutrient that's vital to growth and development should be an absolute priority. Things like eggs, yogurt, milk, and chicken, or turkey sausage are all good choices. Try to limit things like bacon, or ham, though due to the high fat and sodium content. This holds especially true for mornings when you'll be competing shortly after breakfast.

2. Not hydrating sufficiently:

This is another prime example of how many of you are unknowingly sabotaging yourselves. Failing to drink enough water, not only during, but in the hours leading up to sports participation can really hamper your results. Even being slightly dehydrated can cause things like cramping, slower reaction times, and trouble concentrating. Not exactly what you're looking for during athletic competition when even one-hundredth of a second can make the difference between making the play, or being the goat! Here are some guidelines on how to hydrate for before, during and after sports participation:

2 Hours before: 16 ounces

10-20 minutes before: 8 ounces

Every 10-15 minutes during: 4-8 ounces

After: 20 ounces for every pound of body weight lost.

3. Consuming too much sugar:

So far, I've discussed things that young athletes don't consume enough of. Let's switch gears for a moment and talk about the one thing they're getting in massive quantities- SUGAR! According to Chris Mohr, nutritional consultant to the **International Youth Conditioning Association**, where the recommended amount of sugar to be consumed daily is about 10% of total carbohydrate intake, the majority of kids fall closer to the 40-50% range! Granted, a good deal of this is intentional, as many of you tend to favor sodas and "energy" drinks as your beverages of choice. There are also however, a ton of "hidden sugars" lurking in the ingredient list of many of the processed, pre-packaged foods you love. Whether it's honey, or the different types of syrups found in granola bars, or the high fructose corn syrup

that's so prevalent in a wide variety of store-bought foods- including the many of the "whole grain" breads and cereals found on supermarket shelves- the bottom line is, you're getting way more sugar than you need.

Considering the fact that sugar is virtually everywhere these days, the following tips can help you dramatically reduce the amount you are ingesting on a daily basis.

1. When you're thirsty, choose water. Try to stay away from soda completely (has absolutely zero nutritional value and the high phosphorus levels can be a problem for growing bones), and limit sports drinks to times when you'll be exercising, or competing in excess of one hour.
2. Become familiar with some of the names of hidden sugars such as: high fructose corn syrup, honey, glycerin, maltodextrin, cane juice, rice syrup etc. And when you see more than two of these on a food label, especially if they're near the top of the ingredient list, take a pass.
3. Although this next tip won't necessarily reduce your sugar intake, it can help neutralize some of its negative effects to some degree. Eating fast-acting sugars by themselves can create a vicious cycle, whereby the rapid rise and subsequent drop in blood sugar leaves you lethargic, and causes you to crave more sugar! Instead, try to consume some protein, and or fat with your sugars, as this will help reduce their absorption rate and lead to more stable blood sugar levels and sustainable energy. An example would be adding some nuts to yogurt.

****Remember to**

- 1. Always plan ahead for what you are going to eat**
- 2. Obtain adequate amounts of protein**
- 3. Work on Flexibility**
- 4. Supplement your diet with a fish oil and multi-vitamin**

Let me know if I can help. Email me at architechsports@gmail.com

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God Bless,

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