Young Athletes - Meals Before and After the Game

The Basics
All athletes need to be fueled by a proper diet. Young athletes in particular need a lot of food, not just for the extra activity, but for proper growth and development as well. Failure to meet these extra nutrient and energy requirements can result in diminished performance, injury, ill health in general, and may prohibit growth potential\(^1\). Active young adults, girls specifically, need to pay special attention to calcium and iron intake\(^2\). Both girls and boys will need a high amount of carbohydrates for muscle energy and in addition, the diet should be balanced with proper amounts of healthy fats and complete proteins\(^2\).

Timing of Meals
The timing of meals is also important. It is best to intake meals a minimum of 3 hours before an event or training; some athletes can handle a small snack or liquid meal 1 - 2 hours before\(^2\). Regardless, these pre-event foods should consist of carbohydrates that are low in fiber and easily digested. Fats are more slowly digested can make the athlete tired and should be kept to a minimum\(^1\). Maximize starchy carbohydrates that are easy to digest, such as a baked potato, and limit sugary foods such as candy. The initial sugar rush from the candy can later leave young athletes tired and unable to perform well\(^2\). Also be sure not to overdo the protein because it slows down digestion.

After exercise or a game, muscles need to be refueled with carbohydrates and repaired with protein. At this time, the diet can more balanced with the addition of fiber and fat but the total overall caloric intake should be large\(^3\). Post activity meals/snacks should be consumed within 30 minutes after and repeated 1 to 2 hours later\(^1\). A great post workout drink is milk, as it is a great source of both high quality proteins and carbohydrates.

Meal ideas (pre game)\(^4\) –
- Cereal, banana slices, low fat milk and toast/jam
- Chicken noodle soup with crackers, an orange, low fat yogurt and water
- Spaghetti with tomato sauce, bread, and orange juice
- Toast with peanut butter and banana slices, an apple, and low fat milk.

Meal ideas (post game)\(^5\) –
- An egg sandwich with veggies and cheese with a bowl of fruit.
- Salmon with steamed vegetables and brown rice provides healthy fats, vegetables, and protein.
- Grilled chicken sandwich with whole wheat bread, tomatoes and lettuce and milk.

References:

Created by: Darren L. Snyder & Catherine Crinigan