



Soccer Nutrition and Hydration

Do you feel tired during the late minutes of your Soccer games?

Do you feel drained of energy and sluggish when you play? Are you reaching your full potential?

Soccer is an energy-intensive sport for which players need to be in excellent physical condition. Consider that the average adult soccer player usually runs in the range of 3-7 miles a game, and can lose anywhere from 1-8 pounds of water during the game. While there has always been a strong focus on proper conditioning and training techniques, we often neglect to ensure our athletes are getting the proper nutrition and hydration. This requires practicing good eating habits before, during, and following training sessions. Check out these easy tips.

PRE-GAME NUTRITION

What should you consider: Pre-game meals should always include some light grain products (whole wheat bread, cereals, bagels, rice, crackers, etc.) and a combination of fruits and vegetables rich in carbohydrates; (such as apples, peaches, oranges, grapefruits, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, and corn). This blend of food products will provide you with a quality source of energy and charge you up for the soccer game.

What foods should you avoid: Avoid foods high in sugars or fats. This would include fast food products (McDonald's), candy bars, donuts, chips, soda, and high-sugar drinks. These are more likely to make you feel bloated and sluggish on the field and will cause your blood sugar levels to spike and then drop so that you will likely feel more tired and fatigued by the end of game - when you need your energy the most.

FLUID MANAGEMENT

What is the appropriate fluid intake: For many, the principle of taking in at least eight 8-oz glasses of fluid a day is an easy way to remember how much fluid we need. However keep in mind that this philosophy can be a bit misleading. The true amount of fluid intake for athletes depends on how much fluid we are losing or sweating out, and this will certainly vary depending on our activities or sports. It is important to remember that the amount of fluids we consume in a day includes all fluids (those in foods, not just water) and this should be factored into our thinking. Also, caffeinated beverages are diuretics, meaning they cause a net loss of fluid (increasing urination).

Fluid intake before sports participation: Athletes should drink fluids starting *several hours before* they play. Your system can only absorb a certain amount of fluid each hour, so drinking excessive amounts just prior to a game will only result in the need to urinate the excess.

Replace fluids frequently as needed: The more you sweat, the more you will need to replace fluids during your sport. This means starting to replace fluids prior to feeling thirsty in order to avoid dehydration and declining performance. For many this may also include using some sports drinks such as Powerade or Gatorade which help replace sodium and electrolytes that are lost when we sweat excessively. As a general rule, if you are exercising at a high intensity for greater than one hour you will likely benefit from fluids that contain these supplements, whereas they are not necessary for shorter or less intense workouts.

Weather conditions: Hot and humid weather will adversely affect how much we sweat and lose fluids. When performing in these conditions you will need to consider additional fluid intake to offset the increasing loss in fluids

Consequences of poor hydration: A lack of water for a soccer player can produce muscle cramping and dizziness. Without proper hydration you will lose concentration, and fatigue more quickly resulting in poorer physical performance and on-field decision making.

This loss of concentration and performance starts to occur at low levels as soon as you begin to get dehydrated, not just in severe cases of dehydration.

Bottom line : How to monitor your fluids:

- **Pre-game Tip:** If you're concerned about how much water you should be consuming, use the pee test. Prior to game time, your urine should be light yellow, or like the color of weak lemonade. If it is a deep yellow, you need to drink more water. It's that simple. Try to consistently keep that light color throughout the day.
- **Remember:** *Do not wait to until you feel thirsty*, as this is an unreliable method to determine hydration: at this point you are already partially dehydrated. Try to keep steadily drinking throughout the day and throughout your event.
- **Measurement:** Try weighing yourself before and after exercise. If you lose body weight during exercise, that loss should be replaced by an equivalent amount of water consumption (two 8-oz glasses per pound of weight lost) over time.

Here are two links that may be helpful for more information:

Mayo Clinic position statement: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/water/NU00283>

Nancy Clark, Nutritionist, for Active.com, with further in-depth links within the article:
http://www.active.com/nutrition/Articles/Fluid_Facts_for_Athletes.htm

Call BE Fit Physical Therapy for your free injury screening -- 603-653-0040.

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