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Proper Nutrition For Teenage Athletes

Dr. Sean Wahl
Guest Writer



Sports performance is a major topic for today's high school athlete. Over the last decade, the demands on high school athletes have increased dramatically. High school athletes are spending more time developing their skills than any time in history. Many athletes are deciding to specialize in one sport instead of participating in multiple sports. In addition, athletes are often

forced to specialize in one sport in order to improve their skills in order to get playing time.

More athletes are participating in their one specialized sport for the entire year. They are playing on club teams as well as seeking out sports performance institutes to improve their skills. There are debates over the idea that playing one sport all year improves one's ability to perform. A lot of coaches like to see athletes participate in many sports in order to be a more well-rounded athlete; others want their players to focus on one sport.

One topic that seems to be

forgotten is the benefit of proper nutrition to help athletes maximize their performance. If an athlete is not getting proper nutrition, all their training may be hindered due to not properly fueling their bodies in order to become bigger, faster and stronger. Food is the fuel that allows the body to perform properly. An active high school athlete requires the proper amount of calories as well as the proper balance of key nutrients. Teenage boys may require 3,000-4,000 calories, and teenage girls require 2,500-3,000 calories. In addition, the makeup of those calories is important for maximum performance.

Carbohydrates: Carbs are king in regard to the most important fuel for athletic performance. Carbohydrates are stored in muscles for immediate use in athletics. The muscles need to be fully loaded before athletic events to perform properly. The body also needs to be replenished with carbohydrates after athletic events in order to perform properly the next day. Athletes should eat a light snack of complex carbohydrates prior to practice as well as utilizing sports drinks after practice and competition in order to recover properly. Fruits and grains can be used before practice, whereas sports drinks or a banana and granola can be used after events to get proper carbohydrates.

Protein: In order to maximize muscle mass and strength, protein is needed to build muscle and maintain muscle mass during a sports season. Athletes can get all the protein they need by eating food rather than relying on expensive protein powder. In today's fast-paced world, protein drinks can be utilized to get proper amounts of protein. Athletes should focus on eating the following foods to get enough protein: eggs, lean meats, low-fat milk, yogurt, beans and cheese.

Athletes need to pack snacks in order to have readily available foods that supply good nutrients. Trail mix and peanut butter with

crackers can be a great snack to get proper nutrients. Athletes also need to focus on drinking plenty of water to properly hydrate the body. A dehydrated body cannot perform properly. In most cases, plain water is the best way to hydrate the body. Evidence shows that athletes do not need to consume sports drinks unless they are performing high intensity activities for more than one hour. Drinking half your body weight in ounces of water is adequate for most athletes.

All high school athletes should be educated and encouraged to focus on their diets in order to perform to their full potential.

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