

Nutrition

Eating a balanced diet is another key to sports nutrition. The right combination of fuel (calories) from carbohydrates, proteins and fats gives you energy for top performance.

Carbohydrates: The most important fuel source, carbohydrates come in fruits, vegetables, pastas, breads, cereals, rice and other foods, and should provide about 60-70 percent of daily calories. Your body converts sugars and starches in carbohydrates to energy (glucose) or stores it in the liver and muscle tissues (glycogen), giving you endurance and power for high-intensity, short-duration activities like softball. If your body runs out of carbohydrate fuel during exercise, it will burn fat and protein for energy, causing your performance level to drop. This can happen if you start playing without much muscle glycogen, play games that last more than 1 hour without eating more carbohydrates or play in multiple games in a single day. Use a carbohydrate strategy to stay energized and perform at your best:

- Eat carbohydrates for at least several days before exercise/competition, so you start with glycogen-loaded muscles. That means if you are playing in a weekend tournament you should start “carbo loading” on Wednesday. [Did you know that Mac&Cheese is loaded with Carbs? So if you love Mac&Cheese eat a box the day before every game.]
- Eat more carbohydrates during exercise/competition lasting more than an hour to replenish energy and delay fatigue. Find small wrapped snack bars that you like that contain high amounts of carbohydrates and eat them between games or during games that go extra innings.

Proteins: Proteins are also important for your sports nutrition program. Proteins come in meats, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, nuts, dairy products and other foods, and should provide approximately 12-15 percent of daily calories. Proteins give your body power to build new tissues and fluids, among other functions. Your body cannot store extra protein, so it burns it for energy or converts it to fat. The amount of protein an athlete needs depends in part upon level of fitness; exercise type, intensity and duration; total calories; and carbohydrate intake.

Suggestions: Purchase some snacks ahead of time that your daughter can carry to the games with her and keep in her bat bag or cooler.

- Energy bars – There are many brands of very high protein, very high carbohydrate energy bars that are very tasty and will provide a ton of real energy for those long games/practices or tournaments where you play back to back to back.
- Peanuts – Nuts are an excellent source of protein and since they are dry and won’t melt they are an excellent snack that can be kept in a bat bag for times when they are needed. Salt in the shell peanuts are one of my favorite since they also provide sodium (salt) to help retain water and replenish that valuable “electrolyte.”
- Sunflower Seeds – Like nuts they provide an excellent, quick source for sodium and can be kept right in the bat bag.
- Following suggestions are from Marc Dagenais, MHK, CSCS, founder www.softballperformance.com see his complete article at: <http://www.discussfastpitch.com/softball-training/274-nutrition-tips-softball.html>
 - Breakfast: pancakes, waffles, toast, bagels, cereal, low fat granola bars, yogurt, milk
 - Lunch: pastas, rice, bread, rolls, tortillas, potatoes, fruit, fruit juices, yogurt, salads/vegetables
 - Snacks: granola bars, low fat crackers, pretzels, light popcorn, cereal, fruit, fruit juices, dried fruits, fig bars

Concession stand choices: You can almost always plan and pack better nutritional food and keep it in a cooler than you can purchase at the games. But whenever you are faced with a situation where you didn’t bring lunch/dinner and need to eat at the park, think about the choices at the concession stand in terms of what it is going to provide in terms of nutrition. Chicken and burgers provide protein and the bun provides carbohydrates. Hot dogs provide pretty much nothing but fat, but the bun provides carbohydrates. If you have to purchase a Gatorade/Powerade at the park ask for a cup of ice so that you can use it to water-down all of the sugar and keep it cold.

Best advice: Do your research. Find foods/meals that provide a lot of the nutrition your body needs that you also enjoy eating and plan on eating them before games/tournaments, taking them with you in a cooler and knowing what things to order off of the menu at restaurants you may frequent.