



Sports Nutrition Goals

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Sports Nutrition - the Key to a Successful Season!



Water Polo is one of the most physically demanding and mentally challenging sports played today. A player must have a tremendous amount of skill, endurance, speed and mental focus. Water polo is the oldest Olympic team sport, but recently has gained even greater popularity at all levels for women and men.

This monthly column is designed to help improve your water polo skills through proper nutrition. The articles will provide general nutrition tips to help you improve your speed, agility, power, strength, endurance and recovery. All of these are integral components of a well-rounded and successful water polo player. In addition, optimum nutrition impacts the psychological component of the game by helping maintain mental focus, concentration and situational awareness.

It is important for the athlete to understand that nutrition and conditioning are equal contributors to their success in the sport of water polo. An athlete cannot reach his/her full potential without paying close attention to the nutritional needs of the sport.

Q: Why is nutrition so important to an athlete's performance in the pool?

A: *It is vital that an athlete properly fuel their body. You would not expect a car to work without the right type of gas; similarly you cannot expect your body to run efficiently without the right fuel (foods/fluids) either. Eating the right foods and consuming the right fluids at the right time can help the athlete achieve their peak performance!*

Q: Why is proper nutrition important for an athlete prior to practice/competition? In general, what are some foods that make sense to consider an hour or two before practice/competition?

A: *Fueling properly before practice or a game is imperative to an athlete's physical and mental performance. An athlete must "top off" their energy stores by consuming a high carbohydrate snack prior to practice or competition. Ensuring that the snack is high in carbohydrates, (not high in protein or fat) is important since carbohydrates are quickly converted to energy that the body can use to fuel sports activity. Examples include, fruit, granola bars, raisins, pretzels and bagels.*

Q: Why is proper nutrition important for an athlete after practice/competition? What are some general suggested foods that make sense to consider within an hour of practice/competition for recovery purposes?

A: *Post-workout and/or post-competition, it is crucial for an athlete to consume a snack that is high in carbohydrates and moderate in protein within 30 minutes. The 30 minute time window is important to help reduce recovery time. In other words, an athlete will be able to recover faster from one workout to the next. Examples include flavored low-fat milk, peanut butter & jelly sandwich, cereal & milk, and trail mix.**

**It is important for the athlete and coach to understand that even with the right type, amount and timing of your nutrition it will take the body approximately 20-22 hrs to fully recover it's energy stores.*

Q: If an athlete has a tournament and plays 2-3 games in a single day, what foods might make sense for their recovery but also for fuel to play in their games?

A: *Many athletes forget to re-fuel during tournament play which often results in physical and mental fatigue, decreased performance and increased potential for injury. Time in between games varies and therefore what is consumed must vary as well. If there is only one hour between games, an athlete might want to consume a small snack such as a granola bar and a piece of fruit. If there are 3-5 hours between games, the athlete will be able to tolerate a much bigger snack, such as a peanut butter sandwich, piece of fruit and chocolate milk. The amount of food and fluids consumed will vary dependent upon the sport, size of the athlete, environmental conditions, etc. Developing nutrition strategies with a Registered Dietitian is important to ensure all the athlete's needs are being met.*

Q: Regarding proper nutrition and foods to consider, when is the best time to eat before and after a game?

A:

- 30-60 minutes prior to competition an athlete should consume a snack high in carbohydrates.
- Within 30 minutes post-workout or competition an athlete should consume a snack high in carbohydrates and moderate in protein.

Q: Proper hydration before, during and after practice/competition. What are suggested beverages to consider?

A: *Being adequately hydrated is a must! Athletes who do not properly hydrate in and out of the pool are shown to perform poorly both mentally and physically. Sports drinks, such as Gatorade, should be consumed during the sport only. During the day, water, milk and juices are good sources of hydration. Calorie beverages, though, are not recommended in large amounts for some athletes.*

Hydration Guidelines:

- Drink 16oz (2 cups) of fluids 2 hours prior to exercise.
- Drink 4-8oz every 20 minutes during exercise (sport intensity and environmental conditions may have an effect on how much is consumed)

consumed).

- Drink 16-24oz (2-3 cups) of fluids for every pound lost. Weight loss should be minimal. If you find that you lose several pounds during a workout, seek advice from a Registered Dietitian to help you create a hydration plan.

Q: Is there any other advice that you feel would benefit the water polo athlete?

A: A water polo player must be careful and realize that not all foods are created equal. The athlete must understand that there is not just one "super food" that will allow him/her to optimally perform. Seeking guidance from a Registered Dietitian, one that specializes in Sports Nutrition, can help the water polo player get on track to being the best possible performer he/she can be. The information will help you reach your academic and athletic goals. You can find a Registered Dietitian in your area by viewing the SCAN website, <http://www.scandpg.org/mapsearch.php>.