

Sports Nutrition

for Active Children

All children should get at least 60 minutes of activity per day. Participating in organized sports and playing are great ways for children to meet this goal, keep a healthy weight and start a life-long habit of physical activity. Children need enough food to give them energy to grow and play but generally do not need extra calories even if they are physically active. Here are some tips about what and when your active children should eat and drink:

Food is Fuel

- **All children should eat nutrient rich foods from all five food groups (low fat/fat free dairy foods, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein).**
- **Complex Carbohydrates** are a great source of fuel for active children. They are easy to digest and provide quick energy.
 - Complex carbohydrates are found in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, instead of simple carbohydrates that have a high sugar content.
 - Simple carbohydrates can give a “sugar rush” and “crash” instead of sustained energy for physical activity.
- **Protein** should be included in meals and snacks. It is important for growth and strong muscles.
 - Good sources of protein can be found in lean meats, beans, nuts, eggs and low-fat/fat-free dairy foods.
- **Calcium and iron** are especially important for growing children.
 - Calcium is needed for strong bones and can be found in dairy foods like milk, cheese and yogurt.
 - Iron helps carry oxygen to the muscles and can be found in lean meats, eggs, nuts, beans and green leafy vegetables.
- Children who play sports generally do not need more vitamins and minerals than children who do not play sports.
- Sports bars, gels or shakes don’t have a “magic” ingredient that makes children better at sports. Children generally do not need these unless they are very active for over an hour.

Stay Hydrated!

- Before physical activity, children should drink water throughout the day.
- During a game or practice, children should take breaks to drink 5-10 ounces of water every 15-20 minutes or more often if it is very hot.
- After being active, children should keep drinking water to re-hydrate.
- Don’t wait until your child is thirsty to give water!
- Sports drinks are not necessary unless your child is very active for over an hour. Water is the best choice for children.

For more information, go to <http://kidshealth.org>

