

3 Areas Your Athlete's Nutrition Might Be Slipping

By David Benzel



Usually, long before your car runs out of gasoline, you pull into a station and refuel. Unless of course, you are the live-on-the-edge type that waits until there are only fumes left in the tank.

In either case, you know that once your vehicle is empty, “it ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

Performance requires fuel. And our bodies are no different.

Athletes, in particular, can’t afford to live on-the-edge when it comes to keeping their bodies charged and ready to go.

Unfortunately, the typical busy schedule, coupled with highly accessible processed foods, often ends in poor food choices.

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Here are 3 areas to look at, where proper nutrition may be “slipping” for your competitor.

1) Poor Planning

Most often, the logistics of getting your athlete where she needs to be AND purchasing the gear she will use becomes “front-and-center” in your mind as you anticipate a new sports season.

Equally important though – if not more so – is the thought and time that should go into optimizing her nourishment.

The food choices she makes will not only impact her immediate energy needs but will also enable her recovery and her ability to continue to grow and mature.

Taking the time to PLAN out meals and snacks becomes critical for her overall health and for keeping her competitive edge.

And it doesn't have to be complicated.

Pro Tip: Focus on **availability**. Make it EASY for your athlete to make wise choices by having lots of nutrient-dense foods on hand and limiting the foods that are full of empty calories. Things like almonds, sunflower seeds, berries, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, dark chocolate, and protein smoothies make for great snacks. Plan a healthy, sit-down family dinner as often as possible.

2) Tardy Timing

Have you ever been HANGRY?

It's that space when you have waited too long to eat, and your hunger causes you to be angry – at just about everything and everyone.

Our body's energy requirements are no joke when they are ignored. Not only is mood effected, but so is our ability to think, respond, and endure. **And timing is everything if you want to meet the energy needs, yet not clash with the digestive process.**

Optimize your athlete's efforts in practice and competition – and keep them safe by following these guidelines:

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- 3 hours between a full meal and physical exertion
- 30-minutes before practice or a game when eating a healthy snack
- Make sure your athlete is well-hydrated going into all activities
- Don't go into any exercise that lasts longer than an hour, on an empty stomach

Pro Tip: Pay attention to YOUR athlete's individual digestive responses. What works for some may be upsetting for others – in regards to what you can or should eat prior to an event. Carbohydrates usually digest the fastest. However, steer clear of carbs that are high in sugar, to avoid a blood-sugar crash.

3) Reckless Recovery



Heading out for pizza or ice cream after an exciting victory is fun for everyone. However, **keeping it as the rare treat, rather than the norm**, is in your athlete's best interest – even if he doesn't agree.

Since recovery is the name-of-the-game after workouts and competitions, aim for food coming from all 5 of these groups: proteins, vegetables, grains, fruits, and dairy.

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More specifically, here are 5 foods/supplements to pay attention to, especially when dealing with an injury:

- Protein – an essential building block
- Vitamin C – helps to build tissue
- Vitamin D – component of healthy bones
- Zinc – needed for enzymes that aid in wound healing
- Omega 3 fatty acids – helps with the inflammatory response

Pro Tip: Be sure your athlete is replenishing lost fluids during and immediately after strenuous activity. If the exertion lasted longer than an hour, it is important to eat a snack or meal within 15 - 30 of finishing. This is another critical time to be sure your athlete is ingesting some nutrient-dense foods – even if it IS alongside some yummy ice cream.

The Bottom Line

Providing your athlete's engine with the appropriate fuel for sustained energy and thorough recovery takes **intentional** effort.

Pay attention to these three areas to set him up for long-term athletic success:

- Plan out healthy snacks and meals to avoid falling into the habit of poor choices
- Time nutrition out specifically around the physical demands placed on him
- Recover well from exertion and injury by focusing on healing foods and supplements

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