

Avoid The Four Tournament Nutritional Mistakes

Debate is continuing to rise about the advisability of weekend long competitions that require multiple competitions over three days. It is not unusual to play two or more games in one day. Since this is “the way it is” coaches, parents and athletes must pay special attention to proper nutrition in order to insure adequate recovery and to withstand the high levels of demand places on one's body.

Mistake #1: Not Eating Prior to Early Morning Games

As has been said breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It is important to properly fuel the tank with the right kinds of foods. This strategy increases in importance as the day continues and competitions increase in number. Show up for a competition on an empty stomach and one quickly depletes the stored nutrients in the muscle.

Breakfast Options

- Peanut butter, bread and orange juice
- Oatmeal with whole grain bagel
- Cold cereal (no sugary cereals) with low-fat milk
- Yogurt and granola with banana
- Energy bar and sport drink

Mistake #2: Not Eating Properly Prior to Competition

The old belief of not competing on a full stomach can be avoided by getting right foods at the right time-the right pregame meal. Carbohydrates are the first nutrient to be digested by the body and they take about two hours or less to be digested. Protein is digested in about three hours and fats around four hours. So, avoid fats such as an egg/bacon muffin. Use this as a guide.

Mistake #3: Not Refueling/Hydrating Properly After Tournament Games

Before the post-game team meeting or during it recovery refueling should take place. Players should eat a carbohydrate-rich snack within 30 minutes after the end of competition; this allows the muscles to recover some of their fuel, which allows them to have more energy for upcoming games. If this 30-minute window is not met, then it becomes difficult to properly fuel the rest of the day, which also has implications for the next day. Don't forget to drink fluids. The focus is on recovery foods and fluids. Also, get out of the sun as soon as possible if it's a summer outdoor competition. Some players find that after a hot game they do not have an appetite and delay eating. In these cases, liquid meals can be used, or in many cases, a sports drink.

Recovery Nutrition Options

- Energy bar/granola bar/cereal bar and sport drink
- Bagel and sport drink
- Turkey sandwich or sub and sport drink
- Burrito and sport drink
- Pasta with chicken and sport drink
- Waffles/pancakes/French toast, and low-fat milk

Mistake #4: Not Refueling/Hydrating Right After the Last Game of the Day

After the last game of the day, players still need to practice the 30-minute recovery/nutritional recovery strategy. After the last game there's a tendency to forget. Also, athletes should eat a meal within two hours after the recovery nutrition. This works out well and allows players to cool down and get their body temperature to normal and regain their appetite. The meal should contain protein so the muscles can repair and the athletes can feel full and satisfied. Round out the meal with vegetables, fruit and whole grains, plus plenty of fluids. Sport drinks may work well here as they provide energy but not at the same concentration as soda pop. Plus, they contain electrolytes, which help rehydrate players for the next day's competition.

Tournament play is not an ideal world for optimum performance; however, by taking the proper nutritional steps and avoiding making the four mistakes of tournament eating, coaches can assure proper fueling for their athletes.

Source: *Jakie Berning, Lacrosse Magazine 2006*