

Maintaining healthy eating habits on a daily basis is important for athletic performance. What you eat in the days leading up to a game and on game day are opportunities to fine-tune energy and fluid levels.

PRE-GAME MEALS

What you eat before a game can effect how you feel and how you perform during the game. Goals of the pre-game meal include:

- Providing optimal energy levels to prevent fatigue and maintain athletic performance.
- Preventing hunger and discomfort before and during the game.

Overall, the timing and amount of food consumed before a game depends on individual preference, but the following guidelines can help you figure out what works best for you.

Eat a meal 2-4 hours prior to game time. The meal should be high in carbohydrates, moderate in protein, lower in fat (to prevent digestive issues), and moderate in size. Carbohydrates are the key piece of pre-game meals because they will be stored as energy and used during the game. Try to focus on eating whole grain carbohydrates such as 100% whole wheat bread, brown rice, bran cereals, and oatmeal because they will provide longer lasting energy than carbohydrates such as corn cereals, crackers, white bread, pretzels, candy, and other desserts. Dairy products, beans, and fruits are also good sources of carbohydrates to choose from. The meal should consist of foods familiar to you that you know won't cause digestive distress.

Some athletes find they can tolerate a carbohydrate snack 30-60 minutes before warm-up. This may be something to experiment with before practices. Take note of how eating this close to exercising makes you feel. Snacks this close to game time should be carbohydrates that are easily digested such as sport gels, gummies, rice cakes, pretzels and bananas.



Food Is Fuel!

Playing a game without eating before it would be like trying to drive a car without any gas. Food is the body's fuel, and fueling it with the right foods before a game is necessary in order to perform well.

Some athletes get nervous before a game causing appetite loss and digestive problems (e.g. gas, diarrhea), but it is still important for them to fuel their bodies. These athletes may benefit from liquid carbohydrate sources such as sport drinks, gels, and fruit juices. Try out different fueling strategies during practice to find what works best for you.

Make eating a nutritious meal part of your pre-game ritual.



CARBOHYDRATE LOADING

Carbohydrate loading is a nutrition strategy to increase the amount of energy stored in your body for use during exercise. The concept of carbohydrate loading is different than eating a pre-game meal high in carbohydrates in that meals high in carbohydrates are eaten in the days leading up to the event not just the hours. Carbohydrate loading has been shown as an effective strategy to increase performance in exercise events lasting longer than 90 minutes. Since lacrosse games do not last that long this strategy isn't necessary for regular games but may be beneficial during tournaments. Nutrition is very important during times when multiple games per day are played over 2-3 days. Your body will need a lot of energy to perform well during each game. You can begin to prepare your body by eating meals high in carbohydrates 24-48 hours before the start of the tournament, while intensity of practices decreases. The carbohydrates will be broken down by your body and stored in the muscles as energy.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT PASTA!

If your team is having a pre-game dinner chances are pasta will be the star of the show. While pasta is a good source of carbohydrates it doesn't always have to be the focus of the pre-game meal. There are a lot of carbohydrate sources that are healthy and taste good. Try these other carbohydrate sources:

- Brown rice - this grain can be eaten by itself or thrown into a whole wheat tortilla with black beans, lettuce, and salsa to make a high carbohydrate burrito.
- Potatoes - load up a large baked potato with plain yogurt, low fat cheese, and chopped onion. Sweet potatoes will provide longer lasting energy than traditional potatoes such as Russet or Yukon Golds.
- Quinoa - this grain is very versatile and can be eaten during breakfast with apples and cinnamon or made into a savory salad for dinner.



Make the Most of Pre-Game Meals

As you now know what you decide to eat for your pre-game meal can effect your performance. Pre-game meals should be low in fat and fiber because these nutrients slow digestion and can cause an upset stomach. Sometimes it is easy to avoid high fat foods, but fats can also sneak into meals unnoticed. Condiments and dressings are a common way in which fats sneak into meals. Consider the following when eating your pre-game meal:

- Creamy sauces are high in fat. When eating pasta pick a red sauce like marinara over white sauces like Alfredo.
- Avoid garlic bread that is soaked with butter. Ask for a plain roll on the side instead.
- Cream cheese and butter are high fat options commonly paired with bagels or toast. Replace them with jam or honey.
- A lot of cheeses are high in fat. Be careful about ordering cheese filled dishes such as ravioli. If a dish comes with cheese on top ask for it on the side.
- If there is no way you can avoid dessert, eat frozen yogurt instead of ice cream, cakes, or cookies.
- Always ask to get sauces, dressings, and other condiments on the side.