

Return to [newsletter](#).



## Add Nutrition to the Game Day Preparation

*Special to the Washington Youth Soccer Association*

Soccer is about action - the corner kick, dribbling by opponents and the diving catch that saves a goal.

Players, coaches and parents tend to focus on the game rather than the preparation beyond practices. But, that preparation should include what an athlete eats; that can make all the difference when they take the field.

At the college level, athletes often have a training table where nutritious foods are available. At the high school and younger levels, however, athletes — with help from parents — have to make their own nutrition decisions.

"Young athletes are always looking for an edge," says Emily Edison, a registered dietitian who is a Sport Dietitian for the University of Washington Huskies. She consults with UW players about how to fuel before, during and after exercise, and the impact nutrition has on athletic performance.

"Eating healthy meals and snacks, exercising and getting plenty of rest - that's how you reach peak performance. It's not with empty-calorie foods or caffeine-loaded energy drinks," says Edison, the Western Washington coordinator of the Washington Interscholastic Nutrition Forum (WINForum - [www.winforum.org](http://www.winforum.org)).

On game day, athletes should eat a larger meal three to four hours prior to an event or practice, with a snack one hour prior. Or, they can have a smaller meal no sooner than 2-3 hours prior, with a snack right before. The point is to have the food digested and in the muscles to provide energy for games or practices.

---

***People who skip breakfast tend to have slower metabolism and less energy. Breakfast maintains energy and builds a nutritional base."***

---

Liquids digest faster than solids and can be helpful between games — chocolate milk, which provides carbohydrates and protein, is a good option. If practice or a game is longer than 90 minutes, coaches and parents need to provide carbohydrates for fueling muscles as stores run low. Sport drink, orange slices with water, and energy bars are all good examples.

Edison says breakfast is for champions! She recommends that soccer players try to incorporate three or more foods into their breakfast meal, and try to eat at least five grams of healthy fat. A sandwich made with a whole-grain bagel, egg and cheese; granola and nuts cereal with non-fat milk; and toaster waffles with peanut butter and non-fat milk are good options. Add a piece of fruit on the side and you've got a great start on the day.

She adds that breakfast is vital not only on game day, but every day.

"People who skip breakfast tend to have slower metabolism and less energy," says Edison. "Breakfast

maintains energy and builds a nutritional base."

Later in the day, sandwiches and fruit are a good way for players to get what they need. Whole-grain bread; turkey or other lean meat; topped with cheese, tomato slices and sliced pickle; it's ready to go.

Soccer players also need to stay hydrated. Drink plenty of milk or water with the sandwich.

Edison, who likes to mix and match pre-game foods, also recommends sides like yogurt, fruit and honey, or fruit and milk.

"These food combinations are not just good pre-event meals; they also make great snacks throughout the day," says Edison. "What athletes need is a combination of carbohydrate and protein to fuel-up for an event.

"All coaches know that a consistent diet of junk food, candy bars, chips, sodas and donuts will negatively impact their athletes," continues Edison, whose own competitive sports include soccer and water-skiing.

"These foods have high calorie content but are low in nutrients an athlete needs to burn to perform at his or her best."

Edison also points out that it is important for parents and coaches to set a good example.

"Eat well and drink lots of water," advises Edison. "Help your players understand the importance of nutrition for performance."



*Emily Edison is the owner of Momentum Nutrition & Fitness (Emily@momentum4health.com). Edison is a member of the American Dietetic Association and takes part in ADA's practice groups for sport nutritionists (SCAN) and nutrition entrepreneurs (NE). She is also an American College of Sport Medicine (ACSM) Certified Health Fitness Instructor and a member of the ACSM.*

*The Washington Interscholastic Nutrition Forum (WINForum.org) is dedicated to providing important nutrition information to student-athletes, their parents, coaches and trainers. With that goal, the WINForum sessions are held for coaches so they can learn the best nutrition strategies for their athletes.*



Washington Youth Soccer • 500 S. 336th St. Suite 100 • Federal Way, WA 98003  
1-877-424-4318 (Toll Free) • (253) 4-SOCCER (476-2237)

E Play On! is published by [Varsity Communications, Inc.](#)  
12510 33rd Ave NE, Suite 300 Seattle WA 98125 206-367-2420  
For advertising information, please email [Brent Vander Mey](#) at Varsity Communications, Inc.

[Top](#) | [Washington Youth Soccer Homepage](#)