

Nutrition and Sports

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We know that exercise is important for our bodies and it seems that sports is the most popular form of exercise, especially for kids. Sports allow kids to play with many friends at the same time while being active. Kids may not even realize that the games they are playing are actually forms of exercise because they are having so much fun. Kids may also not realize that the types of foods that they are eating can have an impact on how well they feel while playing. A candy bar and soft drink may make it more difficult for them to play and perform at their best. Eating a healthy and well balanced diet will give them the energy that they need to feel great.

MyPlate Food Groups and Athletic Performance

If a candy bar and soft drink will not have us performing at our best, then what will? The USDA's MyPlate is divided into 5 different food groups- Proteins, Grains, Fruits, Vegetables, and Dairy. Choosing foods from each of these groups is a great way to make sure you get all the nutrients you need to keep your body at its best. Within the 5 groups, there are 2 groups in particular that are extra important for athletic performance. Those 2 groups are proteins and grains.

Grains

Foods that fall in the grain category supply us with the most energy to perform at our best. And although it is important for everyone to eat a variety of grains, it is especially important for kids who play sports that require a lot of energy like soccer, football and track. Grains are sometimes called carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are a kind of nutrient and there are two types, simple and complex.

Simple carbohydrates can be used by the body for quick energy for a short period of time. Simple carbohydrates can be found naturally in foods like fruit, milk and veggies. Simple carbohydrates have also been added to foods like candy, cakes and other sweets in the form of sugar. Candy, cakes and other sweets are less ideal for active kids because they lack important nutrients found in fruits, milk and veggies.

Complex carbohydrates take a little longer for our bodies to turn into energy but they last for a longer period of time, giving a child athlete the energy that they need for an entire game. Complex carbohydrates can be found in whole grain breads, pastas, beans, peas, and starchy vegetables like potatoes.

Proteins

Our bodies use protein in many different ways, including growing and repairing muscles. If you have been exercising in order to build muscle, you need adequate protein in your diet. Foods that contain protein can be found in both animal and plant products. Protein that comes from animal sources like chicken and beef are called Complete Proteins. Protein that comes from plant sources like nuts, seeds and beans are usually Incomplete Proteins. You can ensure that incomplete proteins are made complete by eating a variety. For example, you could have peanut butter toast with rice and beans.

Including both grains and proteins in your diet can result in awesome athletic performance. And combining grains and proteins with the 3 other food groups within MyPlate, will ensure a well balanced and healthy diet, full of important building blocks for not only athletic performance, but also proper growth and development too. For more information on MyPlate, visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/myplate>. Enjoy!