



# Pre-game Nutrition

The value of good nutrition for athletes, is appreciated increasingly by footballers at all levels of the game. Coaches must make individuals aware of the impact that certain types of food have on a player's preparation for a season or a game so that they can tailor their diet accordingly.

There are certain basic rules for players to follow before and after a game to improve performance and enable a quick recovery from competition. A balanced diet improves performance in both the short and long term.

This section outlines the basic five food groups – dairy products, meat, cereals, fruits and vegetables – and the value to be obtained from specific types of food in preparing for a game, or a season. It all adds up to a winning diet for football.

## A Winning Diet for Football

Footballers use up far more energy than the average person. This energy can be obtained from carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. However, the ideal source of extra energy is carbohydrates. Running low on carbohydrate causes fatigue. Carbohydrates occur as sugars (simple carbohydrates) or starches (complex carbohydrates). A balanced diet contains both simple and complex carbohydrates.

Bread, cereals and grain products (e.g. oats, wheat, rice, pasta), vegetables and legumes all contain complex carbohydrates. Fruit, honey, and cane sugar are simple carbohydrates. Carbohydrates not used immediately are stored in the liver and muscle as glycogen. Glycogen is the form of energy called upon during exercise.

### Protein

Although protein provides the body with energy, its most important role for the footballer is in building, maintaining and repairing of muscle and tissue. Protein gives the body structure, shape and definition. The main foods in this group are: lean beef, lamb, veal, pork skinless poultry fish and seafood eggs low fat milk, cheese and yoghurt, low fat ice cream and soybeans.

### Fats

Too much fat increases body weight. Fat takes a lot longer to digest than carbohydrate and should be avoided before training or competition. The main foods in this group are: butter, margarine, mayonnaise, oil, fatty meat and poultry, full cream cheeses, chocolate, fried foods or processed meats should all be limited.

### The Ideal Training Diet

To achieve maximum energy levels the footballer needs a well-balanced diet, with the right proportions of carbohydrates, protein and fat. Ideally the training diet for a footballer should contain: 55%-60% of energy from carbohydrates 10%-15% from protein and approximately 25%-30% from fat.

### The Pre-Game Meal

There is no special food which should be eaten pre-game. There are, however, certain guidelines that players should keep in mind. the pre-game meal should consist of complex carbohydrates and fruit the meal should

be eaten at least three hours before the game it is better to eat too little than too much the meal should include plenty of fluids.

High carbohydrate, low fat foods are the best choice for a pre-game meal. Suggested Pre-Game Foods include: Low fat milk or yoghurt Bread, toast, crumpets, or pancakes with suitable toppings – jam, honey, vegemite, baked beans, grilled tomatoes, spaghetti and fruit - fresh or canned.

## **After the Game**

Foods and fluids consumed straight after the game have an important effect on the player's rate of recovery. The best recovery fluids are those containing soft drink, sports drinks, mineral water, fruit juices and plenty of cold water.

Studies show that in the fifteen minutes after the game a player has, the opportunity to restore lost glycogen at a much faster rate than normal. Carbohydrates are essential. Foods to be consumed include bananas, pineapple, oranges, sandwiches, rolls, and low fat yoghurt.

## **Fluid Replacement**

Water makes up approximately 60% of the total body weight and major reductions in this volume can seriously interrupt normal bodily functions and therefore impair performance. Players should be encouraged to replace fluids over a period of time and not in one 'drinking bout'.

Players can lose as much as four to five litres of water over a two hour training session or match. The coach should ensure his players maintain an adequate fluid intake. Drinking before, during and after a training session is important.

Precautions should be taken to reduce the risk of heat injury: arrange training sessions in the cooler parts of the day if the humidity is too high, cancel training keep a close watch on the heavier and less fit players during training and games, fluids should be replaced as often as possible.

Water is the best fluid although some players may benefit from a commercially produced fluid which supplies carbohydrates (e.g. Exceed, Sport Plus, Gatorade, Staminade and Powerade). Fluid replacement is essential during training and competition, with water being the preferred drink.

## **Summary**

The serious footballer will adopt a diet based on moderate eating, choosing food from the following 5 groups: dairy products, meat, cereals, fruit and vegetables. It is preferable to eat more complex carbohydrates and less fat and sugar.