

Just Try it

Going to Bat for Healthy Snacks



By Jill West, RDN/ First appeared in Bay Area Parent Magazine, April 2015

April 2015 | BayAreaParent.com and in print

When it comes to young athletes, parents have many questions about what and how much their child needs for not only growth and development, but also athletic performance. To make matters more challenging, there seems to be a constant stream of new food products being touted as the “best” food or “miracle” food, making it difficult to separate fact from fiction, or marketing hype.

A young athlete has higher energy and fluid requirements than the average child, including needing more protein to build and repair muscles, carbohydrates as a quick energy source, and vitamins and minerals (especially calcium and iron for bone growth).

Unfortunately, studies show that many children and teens are missing out on important nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, fiber and potassium. Skipping breakfast, eating nutrient-poor snack foods and using unhealthy weight control measures impair nutrient intake and athletic performance. Healthy snacks between meals are a great way to help your student athlete perform at optimal levels in school and sports.

Here are great snacks for student athletes:

Pre-Workout:



■ **Snack Bars:** My first recommendation is KIND’s Nuts & Spices line. These bars are high in fiber, a good source of protein and five grams of sugar or less. With flavors like Dark Chocolate Nuts & Sea Salt and Vanilla Madagascar, they are sure to be popular with kids. I also recommend the Fruit & Nut bars because they are made from whole ingredients you can see and pronounce and are packed with heart-healthy fats. Be sure to choose snack bars that are made from whole ingredients. www.kindsnacks.com.

■ **Fruit:** Both fresh and dried fruits are great because they're portable and provide much needed quick energy prior to a practice or workout. They are loaded with vitamins A, E, C and potassium, which help the immune system stay healthy. Fruits such as raisins, dried apricots or cranberries, grapes, apples and mandarin oranges pack well for your child to eat on the way to practice.

■ **Ready-to-eat cereals:** A healthy choice because they're fortified with nutrients, such as folic acid, iron, calcium, and vitamins A and E, and are another quick-energy source. I recommend cereals made with whole grains and that are low in sugar – no more than about six grams of sugar per serving.

■ **Healthy Trail Mix:** By combining low sugar cereal or pretzels with dried fruit and nuts, you create a snack that provides carbohydrates, protein, fiber and vitamins.

■ **Nuts & Seeds:** They are full of healthy fat, fiber, protein, magnesium and vitamin E, and make an easy “grab & go” snack to eat when time is short.

Post-Workout:



■ **Low-Fat Milk:** This is a natural source of calcium, potassium, and protein, and is fortified with vitamin D. Soy milk is comparable to cow's milk in most nutrients as long as it's fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Studies show flavored milk, such as chocolate or strawberry, is a good “recovery” snack after an intense workout to help muscles recover and rebuild faster.

■ **Cheese & Whole Grain Crackers:** Cheese is a quick and easy snack, especially when packaged as sticks or individual servings. Low-fat cheese is full of calcium, potassium and protein. Combine with low-fat crackers made from whole grains or add to sandwiches made with whole wheat bread.

■ **Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich:** Some kids prefer honey to jelly, peanut butter alone or a different nut butter (almond, cashew or sunflower seed) for variety. Any of these options on whole wheat bread or whole grain crackers is a filling post-workout snack. It provides a few more calories than an energy bar and has less processed ingredients.

■ **Yogurt & Fruit:** Greek or regular yogurt are both excellent choices, but provide somewhat different nutrients. Greek yogurt is higher in protein, while regular yogurt provides more calcium. This can be a nutrient-rich choice when combined with fruit.

■ **Beans:** You may be thinking these don't pack well. But if you make or buy roasted beans, such as chickpeas, they are similar to nuts and provide a crunchy alternative that are full of fiber, protein, iron, zinc and magnesium. At home, combine with salsa and wrap in a tortilla to provide the carbohydrate and protein combination needed post-workout.

■ **Healthy Dinner:** Although it's tempting to stop at the drive-through, making a quick entrée, such as a quesadilla combined with a quick-to-prepare fruit, vegetable and a glass of milk, will provide much more fiber, vitamins and minerals. Plus, it will have far less sodium, saturated fat and processed ingredients. It's important to note that if your child participates in all-day tournaments with multiple games (such as soccer or basketball) or in strenuous endurance sports (such as rowing, cross-country running, or distance swimming) that involve 1½ to 2 hours or more of activity at a time,

they will need more food, fluids and nutrients than average. I suggest talking with a registered dietitian to ensure your child's nutrient needs are being met. ■

Jill West, RDN, is an accomplished speaker and author of *400 MOMS: Discover What 400 Nutrition Experts Feed Their Kids*. As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Health Coach with a private practice in Lafayette, she has worked with thousands of individuals and families helping them make healthy lifestyle changes that are practical and realistic for the whole family. Jill lives in the East Bay with her husband and three boys. For more information, visit www.400MOMS.com