



# Fueling Football Players

## Fueling Your Sport

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- The number of calories you need depends on the position you play and your training.
- During two-a-day practices, football players need to eat about 5,000 calories per day. Some players need as much as 9,000 calories per day.
- A sports dietitian can create a nutrition plan to help you build muscle mass, increase speed, or lose body fat.
- Football players need more than 2.7 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight per day (6 g/kg/day). During hard training, you may need 3.6 to 4.5 grams per pound of body weight per day (8 to 10 g/kg/day). Good carbohydrate choices include whole grain breads and cereals, fruits, and vegetables.
- Football players need 0.6 to 0.8 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day (1.4–1.7 g/kg/day). Good sources of protein are fish, chicken, turkey, beef, low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, nuts, and soy.
- Football players need at least 0.45 grams of fat per pound of body weight per day (1 g/kg/day). Choose heart-healthy fats, such as canola oil, olive oil, and nuts.

## Fluid Needs

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- Football players may sweat at a rate of 10 liters per day, and they can lose 12 pounds of sweat in practice.
- It can be hard to get enough fluids, especially during two-a-day practices in the summertime, when you may not be used to the heat.
- Your uniform and pads add weight, which makes your body work harder when you exercise in the heat. This can contribute to dehydration.
- Heat illness is most common on the first day or two of preseason practice. To avoid heat illness, be sure you drink enough.

- Drink at least 2 cups (16 ounces) of sport drink 2 hours before practice or a game.
- Drink fluids at every break in the action and at half-time.
- When you are handed a sport bottle, take it and drink. Water poured over your head does not prevent dehydration.

## Supplements Commonly Used by Football Players

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### Banned Substances

- If you play college or professional football, you are subject to drug testing. A list of banned substances is published by your sport's governing body.
- Be aware that supplements labeled as "natural" are not always safe. They may contain banned substances.

### Creatine

- Creatine can help football players during training because it increases the amount of phosphocreatine in muscles. (Muscles use phosphocreatine as one source of energy.)
- Creatine does not cause muscle cramps or injury.
- Creatine should not be used by football players younger than 18 years because the safety of creatine for people in this age group is not known.
- College and professional athletes who use creatine should not take more than the recommended dose of 3 to 5 grams per day.
- Supplements are not well regulated by the government. Supplements labeled as creatine "blends" may contain banned substances.

### Protein Supplements

- Protein supplements can contain a variety of proteins, including whey, soy, or casein.
- The time when you eat protein may be more important to

building muscle than the type of protein you eat. If you eat a small amount of protein (the amount found in an egg or a couple of ounces of meat or cheese or a glass of milk) before or immediately after exercise, this gives your muscles the building blocks that they need to get bigger.

## Top Three Nutrition Tips for Improving Performance

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### 1. Don't use supplements to take the place of food.

You should get most of the nutrients you need from foods and fluids. Use supplements only as an add-on to your nutrition plan. Remember to include time to eat and drink in your workout schedule—eat breakfast before practice, recover from morning practice with a snack, and eat before and after an afternoon workout. If you use protein shakes for weight gain, drink them between meals and in the evening before you go to bed, not with meals.

**2. Choose a pregame meal that contains foods you like and are used to eating.** Just before a game is not the time to try new foods. Pregame foods should contain carbohydrate and protein (for example, spaghetti and meatballs, meat or cheese lasagna, or lean steak with a baked potato or rice) and should not have a lot of fat (avoid fried chicken or fish, french fries, or fried onion rings). A large meal will take about 4 hours to leave your

stomach, so allow plenty of time between the pregame meal and the game so your stomach will be able to empty before the game. At game time, you want your blood to fuel your muscles; you don't want it going to your gut to digest your meal.

**3. Drink about 3 cups of fluid for every pound you lose during practice or competition.** Weigh yourself before and after practice to find out how much weight you lost. Sport drinks replace sodium lost in sweat. If you are a "salty sweater" (do you see salt rings on your clothes after they dry out or do you cramp frequently?), salt your food and eat salty foods such as canned soup, pretzels, tomato juice, salted nuts, or pickles. (Don't drink pickle juice—the salt in it is too concentrated).

### Nutrition Prescription:

\_\_\_\_\_ calories per day  
\_\_\_\_\_ grams of carbohydrate per day  
\_\_\_\_\_ grams of protein per day  
\_\_\_\_\_ grams of fat per day  
\_\_\_\_\_ cups of fluid per day

Special concerns: