

Taking Care of the Machine

Numerous studies of high level soccer players during multi-day sessions have all led to the same basic conclusion: proper attention to hydration and nutrition has a marked impact on performance. Going beyond those conclusions and deciding which nutritional advice to follow can be confusing because there are so many different opinions on the subject. Much of the debate centers on which specific foods to consume at different times during a focused program of training and competition for a particular sport and, honestly, this level of detail is more appropriate for professional athletes and those competing for the highest stakes. However, there are commonalities among the various schools of thought that are useful for athletes competing at our level and we've listed them for you below.

Note: the following advice concerning food intake may not be appropriate for diabetic athletes!

- Get an hour more sleep each night before and during the training period than you normally require.
- Tank up the day before the training with more water and natural fruit juice than you would normally consume in a day. This will ensure you begin the day Thursday fully hydrated.
- Begin "tapering" meals - it's better to graze than to sit down to full meals. Try to get in 4 or 5 small meals during the day each including a portion of fruit and/or veggies and carbs.
- Start the day with a small portion of carbs and fruit.
- Continue aggressive water intake up until about 2 hours before a match.
- Have a snack an hour before a match that includes carbs with a high glycemic index (GCI) like rice cakes, honey, bananas, raisins or energy bars such as Cliff Bars. These are carbs that raise blood glucose (one of the major sources of fuel during exercise) levels more quickly.
- Drink half of a 16 oz bottle of sports drink before the match (this is really optional if you've chosen carbs well before the match in which case you can substitute water).
- Drink the other half at halftime (again, optional - can be replaced with water).
- Drink water during the match.
- Have plenty of water and a snack after the match that includes a low GCI carb like apples, peaches, pears, yogurt or ice cream (yes, ice cream). This food goes to recovery and should be consumed as soon as possible after the match.
- Continue grazing and aggressive water intake until bed time.

Without question, soda, junk food, caffeine and any of the latest fad drinks like Jolt or Red Bull should be avoided before, during and after the training!

As athletes, we all have stories about playing under adverse physical conditions and "doing fine". We can stay up late, snack on Doritos, start the day with a super-sized coffee, drag our tails to the field, play on an empty stomach and still not pass out. However, your coaching staff would like to see you set your sights a little higher than that! Please give yourselves the best chance you can to play at your maximum intensity by taking care of the machine before and during the training. It will take a little work and planning but this is part of the process when you get to this level.