

Nutrition for Hockey

In the February 2005 issue of Breakout, I wrote an article covering the essentials of a Pre-Game Meal. The beginning of a new season has arrived and I would like to revisit the vital role nutrition plays in optimizing physical and mental performance on and off the ice.

The food we eat is the “fuel” our bodies use to carry on our activities of daily living such as movement, thinking, breathing, healing, etc. There are three basic nutrients that make up the food we eat. They are Proteins, Carbohydrates, and Fats.

Here is a basic overview of these nutrients:

Proteins – the building blocks for muscles and tissues to heal and become stronger.

Foods high in proteins are meats, fish, eggs, cheese, beans, and nuts.

Carbohydrates – in its simplest form is sugar and utilized strictly as fuel for energy.

The right fuels include fruits, vegetables, oatmeal, rice, pastas, and grain breads. The wrong fuels are candy, soda pop, chips, crackers, and white breads.

Fats – make up every cell wall of our trillions of living, functioning cells. The fear of fats is over but we need to know which are good fats to eat. Good fats include olive oil, *real* butter and sour cream, avocados, nuts, and animal fats. The bad fats include vegetable oils/shortening and anything ‘*partially hydrated*’; i.e. fried and processed foods. Did you know margarine products are one hydrogen molecule away from being a plastic bag? How does your body utilize this?

Here is a brief weekly eating schedule that demonstrates the proper utilization of these nutrients:

Pre-Game Meals

Pre-game meals, as discussed before, require the proper types of food, timing of meals, and adequate hydration. These meals should focus on carbohydrates (fruits) and some light protein (chicken, yogurt) foods. These carbohydrates will provide longer lasting fuel in the body and will not kick you down (bonk) as they have been utilized.

After weekend games, your meals should be focused on proteins and fats to help rebuild muscle. Be careful though because these foods will take much longer for the body to digest. Do not eat a high fat, high protein meal before a game or the same day as a game.

Recovery

The early week, Sunday – Wednesday, is focused on eating large amounts of proteins and fats to support muscle recovery and growth. These meals should be low to moderate in carbohydrates. If you hold back carbohydrate intake for 3-4 days they will be utilized more effectively for weekend games when you increase intake later in the week or right before games.

Carbo-loading

The two days before games are designed for carbohydrate loading. The meals should be predominately carbohydrates; fruits, oatmeal, pastas, potatoes, rice. Avoid heavy meats like beef. Light proteins like chicken, yogurt, and cottage cheese are good. Always keep breads to a minimum and absolutely eliminate simple sugars – soda, candies, crackers, etc.

Please note, this schedule is directed towards a highly active hockey player and not intended for the general population.