

Mission In Motion  
Health & Wellness  
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Fall Tip

## Fueling Future Sports Stars

Fall sports are fast approaching. Before the glare of the Friday night lights, many kids and teens are at practice preparing for the new season. Whether your young athlete hopes to be the team captain or part of the squad, a healthy diet can help him or her shine.

No magic food, beverage, or supplement can turn average children into superstars. Still, optimal performance requires a consistent, balanced, healthy diet with a few extras to fuel their added energy consumption.

### Daily Diet

Young athletes should eat a balanced diet including a variety of foods that are nutrient-rich but not loaded with fat, salt or added sugar. Here are some tips:

- Grains and vegetables should make up half the menu. Be sure they're minimally processed and include whole grains and a range of colorful vegetables and fruits.
- Go lean with protein. Include 4 to 6 ounces a day of lean beef, pork, skinless chicken and turkey, and fish. Tofu, dried beans and peas, eggs, and nuts are good protein sources, too.
- Growing, active children need 2 to 3 cups a day of reduced-fat milk and other dairy foods like cheese and yogurt.
- Limit solid fats and foods that contain them. Get your oils from fish, nuts, soft margarine, and vegetable oils such as corn, soybean, canola, or olive.
- Choose food and beverages low in added sugars and other caloric sweeteners.

Protein supplements have not been proven to enhance muscle development, strength, or endurance. Amino acid supplements don't increase muscle mass or decrease body fat.

### Adequate Fluids

Active children and teens face an increased risk for dehydration and heat-related illnesses due to lack of fluids. This risk worsens during hot, humid weather and long, intense competitions.

Despite the advertising claims of electrolyte and sports drinks, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests they offer no real advantages for child athletes and potential disadvantages. They can replace some of the salts and sugars that children lose through vigorous exercise, but they're high in sugar and other substances that may cause cramps, nausea, and diarrhea. Additionally, sports drinks contain extra calories that children don't need, and could contribute to obesity and tooth decay. While it may not be cool, plenty of water is the better choice.

Sources: [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Livestrong.com](#)

For more information on keeping your star athlete hydrated visit the health and wellness section of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas website.