

# Game Day Diet – What to eat before and after a game...

## **Goals of sport nutrition (excerpt from Wikipedia.com)**

“Some of the main goals of sport nutrition are to prepare athlete for performance or training, to maintain the level of performance or training, and to help recovery from performance or training. Sports nutrition has many goals to improve performance. First, it improves performance by improving the body composition, which will increase speed, quickness, mobility, and strength. Second, it will help with speed and recovery, which will in turn create more capacity for practicing and competition. Third, it will allow you to increase energy for both practice and competition, which obviously will help your performance. Then it will also increase immunity, which will help you to stay healthy and be able to keep practicing and competing all the time. Lastly, it will improve your overall health, which is very important for all aspects of life.”

## **Nutrition Notes / Facts / Suggestions:**

I need to first make it clear that the information below was not written by a doctor or any expert in the field of nutrition, but rather suggestions and advice over the years from doctors and nutritionists (that were also coaches) that have proven to be very useful to the teams I have coached. It is very important for players to eat the right food (or snacks) before, during, and after a basketball game. Players are not trying to eat to “build” muscle on game day – they are eating so they can get the best “use” of their muscles on game day!

Building your muscles requires protein (which you can get from peanut butter, meat, cheese, beans, etc) – Using your muscles requires carbohydrates (which you can get from fruits, bread, juices, gatorade, pasta, etc). To use muscles, you need the energy you get from carbohydrates. Eating the wrong things before a game (or even after the game) can keep players from getting the much needed energy necessary to sustain during games.

It is highly recommended that players are not allowed to eat foods with a lot of fat and protein for at least two hours before a game or within one hour after a game. Why? Because lots of protein and fat makes it harder for a players body to absorb the carbohydrates needed for energy during a game – foods not recommended are burgers, hot dogs, chips, french fries, cheese, beans, and even peanut butter.

Fast food places like McDonalds, Burger King, and Wendy’s are the players favorites, but not exactly the best food to eat before or after a game (especially if you have another game to play).

## **Game Day Breakfast:**

Eat a good breakfast on game day. Foods like cereals, pancakes, waffles, bagels, french toast, regular toast (with jelly), bananas, muffins, and juices are very good choices if you are playing a game in less than two and a half hours.

## **Just Before a Game:**

If a player has to eat something right before a game – have them drink some gatorade or juice, fruit, or even a candy bar (but not more than one candy bar – but nothing that has any sugar substitutes, you want real sugar).

### **During the Game:**

It's helpful for players to drink gatorade during the game, and players will get thirsty – so make sure that gatorade (and water) is readily available. All the players should at least snack on something during half time – cut up oranges, apples, or raisins are very good choices.

### **After the Game:**

After a game it is recommended that players wait at least an hour (or more) before they eat a good dinner (with protein). If players are really hungry right after a game have them eat an orange or apple to hold them over (for at least one hour after the game). I also read an article a while back that claimed that fat production basically stops for a period of about 45 minutes after a workout (or exercise) – so those candy bars the players ate before the game will not create any weight “gain” after the game (this point could be important for some players to know, or not?).

### **So you have more than one game today:**

It is recommended that players wait at least two hours between the time they eat a full meal and the time they start the pre game warm up for your next game. In the AAU competitive leagues, some tournaments schedule teams to play in three games on a Saturday, and then more games on Sunday – so coaches must ensure that players are getting the nutrition they need. I have seen players eat hot dogs and cheese fries just before games, and then watch their coaches yell at them for not playing hard (having no idea that poor nutrition could be a big part of why they are not playing hard – and they may be out of energy).

### **In Conclusion...the last word on nutrition!**

Game day requires more than just X's and O's and game strategy – it requires organization, planning, and ensuring the players eat right (throughout the day). Coaches must understand that nutrition is part of the game. As a coach, I understand that I just didn't have time to go out and buy food, cut up oranges, fill coolers, etc. So I put the parents in charge of organizing the nutrition aspects of the game – and they always worked it out so the players always had food and drink required for game day. Coaches should enlist their teams parents to assist with this very important (but often ignored) part of game day!

*Courtesy of AVCSS Sports Club, LLC*