

A Healthy Lifestyle for Athletes

Competitive high school sports are highly demanding on many different levels. This season, you will be challenged physically, mentally and emotionally. The rewards are numerous, but you must take care of your body to get the most out of it.

Sleep: Going to bed at the same time every night has been proven more effective than getting a set number of hours each night, but healthy, athletic teenagers still need 8 hours of sleep per night. It is important to sleep without distraction, this means charging your cell phone in another room instead of 6 inches from your head so the text from your unhealthy friend at 3am doesn't wake you. I know you're a popular kid, but you must make the decision on how successful you want to become as an athlete. Was that text at 3am worth oversleeping and or being tired at school & practice the next day? If you aren't getting your sleep at night, make sure you are getting a long, uninterrupted nap in the afternoon to offset your poor sleeping habits at night.

Nutrition: All you need is a healthy, well-balanced diet. Protein shakes, recovery drinks and nutritional supplements can help, but aren't a replacement for eating right. Below are a few guidelines for nutritional intake and how to spread your meals. These are general guidelines and will not work for everyone's body type or intestinal track. If you have specific questions, Coach Cooper can refer you to a local nutritionist.

High school athletes should be eating (these amounts are per day):

- 15-20 calories per pound of body weight (athletes looking to lose weight should be closer to 15cals, and athletes looking to gain weight should be closer to 20cals)
- 1.0g of protein per pound of body weight (0.1-0.3g more if you are lifting to gain weight)
- 2.0-2.5g of carbohydrates per pound of body weight (quality carbs please!)

Meals should be spread out throughout the day:

- Breakfast that contains protein and fruit (your brain runs on glucose)
- Pre-workout meal about 90mins before practice: light meal w/ protein (protein bars are great)
- Post-workout drink within 45mins after practice: should contain 15g of protein and 45g of carbs
- Post-workout meal about 2.5hrs after practice: a regular healthy well balanced meal
- Lunch can be tough to eat healthy at school, use the fridge in Coach Cooper's room so your well-balanced and healthy meal is kept fresh
- Depending on your schedule (1st lunch vs 2nd lunch), you will need to eat a mid-morning or afternoon snack

Most HS students (especially student-athletes) don't eat enough calories, a 160lb person should be eating 2,700+ calories. Spread your intake out over multiple meals and snacks, be sure to eat REAL FOOD as often as you can. Shakes and supplements should only be used for the post-workout recovery drinks or part of one meal per day. You can't live on protein bars and Muscle Milk drinks!

Iron Deficiency: This is one of the most unknown issues amongst high school athletes (primarily distance runners) and also one of the most harmful. Low iron levels lead to extreme fatigue and exhaustion in runners, it can easily ruin an athlete's season. The best way to prevent this is to eat a diet that contains natural iron sources: leafy green vegetables, whole grains, beans, eggs and red meat. Eating these foods with vitamin C greatly increases their absorption into the blood stream, likewise dairy & caffeine can hinder absorption. If athletes are taking a daily multi-vitamin, make sure it contains iron. If you are constantly fatigued, have your parents talk to a coach and they can tell you how to get your iron levels tested.

Hydration: Drink when you are thirsty, no exceptions. Your water bottle should stay within your reach at all times during the day. Stay sipping! Water is ideal, everything else has sugars, chemicals and flavoring added. Gatorade tastes great, but is unnecessary (and can cause weight gain) unless the athlete has been sweating for at least 60min. Staying hydrated can be difficult throughout the school day so it must be a priority for the athlete. Remember that on cloudy/ cooler days, you still need to stay hydrated.

Balance: It may take a few late nights or a few tired days of school & practice, but athletes have to find the right balance between school work, athletics, family obligations and their social life. This is an important life skill to develop and the sooner athletes find the right balance, the sooner they can spend the right amounts of time being successful. A well balanced life will promote a positive mindset and avoid a lot of stress. Coaches are here to assist athletes in every aspect of their training, education and maturation as a young-adult, come to us if you need anything!

You know your body better than anyone, if something isn't right, please speak up and let us help you. We have an amazing network of local resources to help you with any aspect of a healthy lifestyle.