Fuel Up Before and After Competition

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Whether you are heading out for a two-hour practice or a game, proper nutrition before AND after can go a long way in keeping student-athletes in good condition throughout the season. The American Dairy Association and Dairy Council educates student-athletes throughout the year on tips for proper nutrition and with the strain that practices and games put on a person’s body, it’s important to take care of your muscles.

“After a practice or game, your muscles are like sponges,” said Molly Morgan, RD, CDN, CSSD, Owner of Creative Nutrition Solutions and nutrition consultant to the National Hockey League’s Ottawa Senators. “The winning combination is carbohydrates and protein.”

Some tips for recovering from practices and games include having water immediately following and then a snack approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours later, such as:

• Peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole wheat bread
• Apple and handful of almonds
• Yogurt with sliced fruit
• Turkey and cheese with whole grain crackers

“A perfect post-game or after practice solution for refueling tired muscles is chocolate milk,” said Morgan.

Just as important as recovering from practice or a game is preparing your body for competition.

“What you eat before practice should have some carbohydrates, protein, and be lower in fat,” said Morgan. “Some great pre-practice suggestions: granola bar and piece of fruit, whole wheat bread or graham crackers with light spread of peanut butter and a banana, yogurt with granola and fruit, whole grain cereal with milk and sliced bananas, or whole wheat bread with turkey, sliced veggies, and cheese.”
And what if you have a day without practice or a game?

“Off days are just as important as game days,” said Morgan. “Keeping your body working at its peak requires routine consumption of nutrient-rich foods including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, protein and dairy.”

Morgan offers the following nutrient-snack ideas:
- Fruit and yogurt parfaits (layer yogurt, granola, and sliced berries in a glass)
- Pistachios and dried fruit
- Hummus and sliced cucumbers
- Baby carrots and ranch dip (look for yogurt-based dressings)
- Cheese stick and a pear
- Ants on a log (celery with peanut butter and raisins)
- Chocolate-banana shake (blend 1 cup chocolate milk with 1 frozen banana, until smooth)

Morgan adds that any practice snack or meal should be easy of your stomach and what may be easy on one student-athlete’s stomach may be different than another. In addition to pre and post nutrition, Morgan advises to have water or sports drinks on hand to stay hydrated throughout a practice or game.