

SOFTBALL SPORTS NUTRITION



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“My hitting in game two of doubleheaders always seems to go downhill. I feel tired and not as sharp. Could that have something to do with what I’m eating in the pregame meal? What should I eat and drink during and after game one?”

Collegiate softball is a highly competitive, fast-paced game requiring a unique mix of strength, speed, power and agility, in addition to sharp focus, quick judgment and split-second reaction time, to excel. The playing season is dynamic and rigorous, with most teams playing 50 or more games during the regular season. Nutrition and hydration impact every aspect of your game as a softball player. Take advantage of the fueling strategies presented here to help maximize your training and performance.

Information presented by



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FUELING VICTORY

A COMPLETE YEAR OF FUELING

PRESEASON (December, January)

Fueling Goals:

- Support skill work and development of team play
- Increase strength, speed and power

Preseason is the ideal time to establish nutrition and hydration habits that will complement performance throughout the season. Unfortunately, softball student-athletes’ most critical training months coincide with fall semester exams and winter break, forcing some

limitations on team sessions, routine and consistency. The best steps you can take are to establish strong fueling habits despite variations and inconsistencies in schedules and training. Keep meals and snacks as close to “on time” as you can, avoid skipping meals, and plan ahead so you always have good-choice options available.

WINTER BREAK

A trip home or away from the team doesn’t have to play havoc on your fueling plan, but it certainly could. Set yourself up to avoid taking steps backward. Enjoy your time off and

enjoy some of your favorite foods, but keep your strong fueling habits and routines in place most of the time. One holiday meal and a couple of treats fit into most athletes’ training — but a week of splurging will affect your upcoming play.

IN SEASON

(February, March, April)

Fueling Goals:

- Optimize performance
- Speed recovery between games

Game-day nutrition is essential to softball success. Use the fueling formula shown here for game-day nutrition.

FUELING FORMULA FOR GAME-DAY NUTRITION

	FUELING FORMULA	EXAMPLES	AVOID	NOTES
PREGAME MEAL (Three to four hours before game time)	Lean protein + Long-lasting carbs + Fat (small amount) + Colorful fruit or veggie + Fluids	Grilled salmon or chicken + Sweet potato or rice + Butter + Green beans + Water OR Scrambled eggs + Oatmeal + Peanut butter (in oatmeal) + Dried cranberries + Orange juice and water	Fried foods, spicy foods, entrée salads, creamy sauces or dressings, sweets, high-fiber foods, caffeine, soda, foods or beverages you’ve never tried before	Some athletes forget the protein! Protein helps your fuel “stick with you” throughout the game. Even at hotel breakfast bars, you may be able to find boiled eggs, yogurt, milk or peanut butter. Meat or beans are good options in afternoon meals. Or pack your own sports bars.
TOP-OFF FUEL (Before warm-ups)	Varies by athlete in terms of tolerance. Protein (optional) + Carbs + Fluids	Sports bar + water OR Banana + sports drink OR Fig bars + water	Fast-acting sugars unless you’ve had a great pregame meal. No caffeine.	This fuel provides the opportunity to boost energy stores for the game and prevent hunger.
DURING-GAME FUEL (Throughout game)	Carbs + Fluids	Sports drinks, pieces of sports bars, fresh or dried fruit or fruit leathers, trail mix.		Avoid feeling hungry while you’re playing. This is an indicator that your body is low on fuel. Eat and drink during games before you get hungry and thirsty.
RECOVERY NUTRITION (Immediately after game)	Protein + Carbs + Fluids	Chocolate milk ½ PBJ + water Trail mix + sports drink Cheese/crackers + water		ASAP after exercise completion is the ideal time to repair, replenish and rehydrate. Consuming recovery nutrition also “buys time” before athletes need their postgame meal; 90 minutes to two hours is appropriate as long as you’ve consumed recovery nutrition.
POSTGAME MEAL	Protein + Carbs + Fluids	Balanced meal, more relaxed guidelines than the pregame meal. Emphasize fluids!	Caffeine	

As you eat with your teammates at team meals or restaurants, make your performance nutrition goals a top priority. The temptation to overindulge or make suboptimal choices is great, especially when traveling, at tasty restaurants and on someone else's dime! But your drive to win and be your best is greater. Find foods and beverages you enjoy that meet the winning formula and save splurges for other occasions.

Throughout the season, student-athletes are busy doing class work and preparing for games, and it's not uncommon for nutrition to take a back seat. **Remember that game-day nutrition is impacted by the quality of weeklong fueling.** Compensating for suboptimal nutrition and lifestyle choices by consuming energy drinks is missing the mark and strongly discouraged.

CHAMPIONSHIP/POSTSEASON

Fueling Goals:

- Optimize performance
- Speed recovery between games
- Maximize hydration status

Be sure to adapt the fueling formula you've used all season to different game times, climates and fueling settings. It's a great idea to have your favorite staples readily available – oatmeal packets, nuts, nut butters, sports bars, dried fruit, etc. Between games in a doubleheader, you may want to double what you normally consume for recovery nutrition. For example, if chocolate milk usually serves as your postgame recovery (before your postgame meal), try chocolate milk plus a peanut butter

and jelly sandwich. Don't forget to hydrate, especially as temperatures heat up in early summer. Nerves, excitement, heat and dehydration suppress appetite, so be sure to establish and stick to your schedule.

OFFSEASON

Fueling Goals:

- Improve conditioning
- Make changes in body composition
- Experiment with nutrition

SUMMER

Every student-athlete needs recovery and relaxation, but remember that the offseason may actually be the optimal time for your nutrition on-season! Because your training is less intense, your carbohydrate needs are lowest during these months. Certainly do not avoid carbohydrates, but focus on smaller side portions of whole grains and fill half your plate with fruits and veggies at each meal. The offseason is the time to focus on any significant body composition changes. Many players make efforts to increase cardiovascular fitness, make strength and conditioning gains, and build new cooking skills during summer months. Over-fueling and lots of poor choices during the summer make for extra work during fall training. Lead off the year in great shape.



FALL TRAINING

Make a personal effort and join with your teammates to create habits that will last throughout the season.

- Identify weaknesses in your diet. Do you skip breakfast? Do you eat too little throughout the day and find yourself over-hungry at night? Are there nutrition topics you need to learn more about?
- Identify your strengths. Do you consistently hydrate adequately? Do you always consume five fruits and veggies per day?
- Maximize your strengths and work with coaches, teammates and support staff to improve weak spots in your diet.

The fall is about perfecting skills that win games in the spring — and nutrition is no exception!



YOUR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Successful collegiate softball players possess unique physical attributes, skills and athletic backgrounds. Work with a sports registered dietitian, your coaches, sports medicine team, and strength and conditioning coaches to establish a specific plan unique to your goals. Consider these tips to create your individualized plan:

- Don't compare yourself to standards or teammates. Instead, work to make positive personal gains and body composition improvements.
- Depend on your teammates to help maximize your nutrition strategy by cooking together, making healthy restaurant choices, hydrating on the field and practicing consistent recovery nutrition.
- Be open to trying new foods, ideas and fueling strategies. You never know what's going to be the small change that turns into winning results!

FUELING SOFTBALL ATHLETES

Softball players benefit from a nutritionally balanced diet that fluctuates with training volume and intensity. Formulating a yearlong game plan is critical. Keep in mind:

- The ideal nutrition plan is one that you enjoy, is practical and sustainable, and positively influences performance.
- Nutrient timing is a key to softball success. Split your intake into medium-sized meals and small snacks throughout the day, so you're eating every three hours or so. Frequent fueling will keep your energy level high and optimize muscle mass and recovery. Many student-athletes find this schedule beneficial:
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Snack before training (adjust timing if practice is not in afternoon)
 - Recovery snack (within 30 minutes of completing workouts)
 - Dinner
 - One additional snack

A common problem for busy student-athletes is underfueling during the day, when your bodies need energy the most, and then overeating at night. Aim to consume two-thirds of your daily food before dinner.

- Meals and snacks should contain lean protein. Excellent sources of lean protein are lean meats, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, tofu, soy, beans, milk, cheese, yogurt, nuts, seeds, and peanut or other nut butters. Regularly incorporate healthful fats such as oils, oil-based salad dressings, nuts, seeds, fish and avocado.
- Carbohydrate needs fluctuate the most throughout the training year. Carbs are the primary fuel for softball, and your carb needs differ from that of athletes who play more aerobic sports, such as soccer or cross country. When you train hard and play a tough schedule, your needs are higher. During the offseason and on lower intensity days, your needs are lower. In general, the top choices are long-lasting carbohydrates that come from whole grains (whole-grain bread, brown rice, oatmeal,



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whole-grain cereals, corn, popcorn, etc.), beans, veggies, many fruits and dairy products.

- Many people eat the same 10 foods 90 percent of the time. Expand the variety of foods you consume to get micronutrients you need.
- Make smart choices with sugary drinks. Save sports drinks for during and after practice and games. Use the "3-H" rule with sports drinks: Select sports drinks instead of water when it's *hot*, the workout is *hard*, and it will last longer than an *hour*. Otherwise, drink water for hydration. Don't drink your calories. Soda, lemonade, lattes and other sugary beverages can accumulate to excessive levels and can detract from performance.