

In celebration of Kids Eat Right Month Karlien Smit (RD) has compiled a selection of nutrition tips for active children.

## **NUTRITION TIPS FOR ACTIVE CHILDREN**

The ideal training diet complements training for peak performance at competition and can help minimize injury. It also helps achieve overall goals such as optimal growth and development, body weight and health.

An ideal training diet for active children focuses on the “*what*” and the “*when*”.

The “*what*” refers to providing sufficient energy (kilojoules) by including a variety of nutrient-rich foods in specific quantities at meals and snacks. The precise quantities of nutrients vary between individuals (genetics, gender and body composition goals) and change with growth, maturation, age, training frequency and intensity.

- Always start the day by powering up with a nutritious breakfast and pack in a healthy lunch, with healthy snack options for school and after-hours activities. Ensure that meals offer a combination of high fibre starches and grains and some lean protein (meat, fish, chicken, eggs, legumes, dairy) prepared with healthy fats and accompanied by a variety of vegetables and fruit.
- Growing children need calcium to support optimum bone growth and development. Increase your child’s dairy intake by including low fat milk or yoghurt, fruit & yoghurt smoothies; using milk (or powdered milk) to enrich porridge, soups and sauces etc. If your child does not eat dairy, include other sources of calcium such as fish (with edible bones), dried beans, soya milk, tofu, broccoli and almonds.
- Make sure your child has a bottle of water to take to school and encourage them to drink regularly during exercise. As a general rule, keep the intake of sugary drinks to a minimum. On occasion very active

children can use a carbohydrate-containing drink (diluted fruit juices/ cordials or a sports drink preferably with minimal additives) if participating in high intensity exercise that lasts longer than an hour.

Don't lose focus on the big picture. If you keep in mind the principles of variety, moderation, colour and crunch– you will be well on your way to provide a healthy diet for your growing child!

The "**when**" refers to timing snacks around training. This ensures optimal fuel during exercise, prevents hunger and gastric discomfort, and improves recovery.

- Pack portable snacks for after school such as fruit, sandwiches, lean biltong, bran muffins and cereal/sports bars. Best is to have this at least 1 hour prior to exercise.
- If your child's energy needs are high and/or appetite or time is limited, pack in concentrated options like dried fruit or trail mix or a fruit yoghurt/smoothie.
- If your child has multiple training sessions in a day improve the rate of recovery by incorporating a good quality source of protein e.g. low fat dairy, chicken or egg together with a portion of carbohydrate to be eaten within 40 minutes after training. This can be a sweetened low fat flavoured milk drink, amahewu mixed with pap or a boiled egg on 2 slices of brown bread.

Notice that the emphasis is on real food and not on supplements. Besides cost, there may be health and safety risks associated with supplement usage and there is a very real risk of supplements being contaminated with WADA-banned substances. There is also an association with early supplement use and the abuse of illegal or banned substances later in life. Contrary to what one may hear, there is no supplement that by itself can provide a quick-fix or magic.

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