



Food for footy

You can have all the footy skills in the world but without the proper nutritional support you won't be as fit as you can be and your performances will suffer.

You won't be able to train as hard or as long, so you won't improve your play, and during games you run the risk of getting tired.

How you perform during games and training depends on what you eat and drink **before, during** and **after** each match or session.

Here are some of the essential nutrients young footballers need to be eating, and which foods they're found in.

Nutrient	Found in
Simple carbohydrates	Sweets, cakes, soft drinks, jam
Complex carbohydrates	Rice, bread, pasta, potatoes, cereals, fruit
Saturated fats	Butter, margarine, cheese, pasties
Unsaturated fats	Sunflower oil, salmon, nuts
Protein	Milk, chicken, eggs, fish, yoghurt
Vitamins and minerals	Fruit, vegetables, dairy products
Fibre	Seeds, peas, beans
Water	Foods, drinks, formulated sports drinks

It's important to eat a range of these foods.

- Meat and meat alternatives - meat, fish, eggs, beans and nuts
- Vegetables and fruit - root and leafy vegetables, salads, apples, oranges, bananas
- Dairy products - milk, cheese, yoghurt
- Starchy foods - bread and rolls, pasta, rice, cereals, potatoes

Footballers need energy, and that's most commonly found in carbohydrate. Now, in a healthy diet, 55-60% of it should come from carbohydrate, but for footballers, it's even higher - as much as 70%.

Of course, players need other nutrients too and it's not easy to get the perfect intake of carbohydrate from eating a regular three meals a day. The way to do it is by snacking - snacks play a crucial role in a footy player's diet, especially if eaten immediately after training or a match. That's when the energy stores in the muscles which have just been working are best refuelled.

Snack attack! These snacks are high in Carbohydrate but low in fat:

Banana, jam or honey sandwiches
Muesli bars
Fruit cake, currant buns, scones, American muffins
Crumpets, bagels, English muffins, scotch pancakes
rusks and cereal
Jelly cubes
Jaffa cakes,
Low fat rice pudding, bread pudding
Yoghurts and milkshakes
Fruit and dried fruit

We've done good food and bad food, and we've looked at what snacks can boost the body during and after a match or training session. Now let's look at what you should drink.

The water lost from the body during sweating needs to be replaced to stop you getting tired quickly, and also speed up the recovery process – that means feeling fitter and sharper afterwards a lot sooner.

These checks will help players:

- Weight – 1kg of weight lost during a training session is equal to 1 litre of fluid lost.
- The 'pee test' – If your urine is dark coloured, it means you need to have a drink. Lots of trips to the toilet, producing lots of clear coloured urine, shows you've taken on enough fluid.
- Thirst – Being thirsty is an unreliable indicator of when you need to have a drink. If you're thirsty, you're actually already partly dehydrated so if you finish a training session and you're gasping it's a giveaway you haven't taken enough fluid on board.

What's best to drink?

For footballers, the best fluid to drink is a diluted carbohydrate/electrolyte solution. In plain English, that's the kind of stuff you'll find in stuff in energy drinks like Gatorade.

When should I drink?

Ideally, it's best to drink before, during and after a training session, as well as drinking frequently during a match.

How much should I drink?

Only a little – but often. If you drink too much too quickly, you run the risk of getting a stomach upset.