

# PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK



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## Soccer: Energy for Tournaments

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Tournaments present unique opportunities and challenges for the individual soccer player and the team as a whole. While it's essential for athletes to arrive at the tournament well-hydrated, one of the most important challenges is supplying adequate fluid and food to fuel the athlete participating in multiple matches throughout the tournament period. What makes the challenge especially complex is the twofold nature of the dilemma, that of supply and demand.

### Multiple matches mean increased demand for energy.

A single soccer match could deplete most of a player's fluid and nutrition reserves. During a tournament, matches may be as close as an hour apart, leaving little time to rebuild fuel stores. Consequently, fatigue sets in sooner; speed, skills, accuracy, and concentration are compromised. The risks of dehydration and cramping increase. In warm environments, the degree of dehydration and its associated dangers are even higher.

### Planning ahead will ensure an adequate supply of "sport-friendly" foods.

Immediately after a match, the hunger sensation may be blunted; it is crucial that foods or beverages consumed at this time be high in carbohydrate (CHO), the preferred fuel for the physical demands of soccer. In order to store those carbohydrates as muscle glycogen, the body also needs sufficient fluid.

Tournament concession stands offer limited selections, often with many high-fat foods. Fast food restaurants may be an option, but careful selection is necessary to ensure adequate amounts of carbohydrates. When possible, the best bet is to bring a supply of "sport-friendly" foods and beverages to the tournament. Even when traveling far from home, there are some simple tips for ensuring a supply of portable foods and fluids that meet the high-energy demands of soccer tournaments.

### Choose beverages and carbohydrate-rich foods that power soccer players and travel well.

#### Beverages

- **Choose a sports drink.** Favor a sports drink over water, because electrolytes replace the sodium lost in sweat, carbohydrates fuel working muscles, and flavor encourages drinking. Use these techniques to avoid dehydration:
  - Monitor fluid losses by weighing in and out of practices. Teach athletes to aim to drink enough during practice so that they don't lose or gain weight. During recovery and for every pound of weight lost through sweat, drink 20 to 24 ounces.

- Remind athletes to check the color of their urine. If it is pale like lemonade, that's a sign of good hydration. If it's dark like apple juice, they need more fluids.

- **Water alone doesn't cut it.** It blunts thirst and doesn't supply needed nutrients to fuel the body. Furthermore, water alone may worsen dehydration by diluting the body's electrolyte-to-fluid ratio.
- **Skip the soda.** The carbonation makes it harder to gulp down enough fluid, plus carbonation can bloat the stomach, causing indigestion.
- **Cut the caffeine.** Caffeine's side effects, including jitters and increases in blood pressure and heart rate, can overshadow any perceived benefits.

#### Carbohydrate-Rich Foods

To quickly restore lost muscle glycogen, soccer players should consume 2g CHO per kg (.9g CHO/lb) body weight within the first 2 hours after a match. Pre-game meals should be eaten 2 to 3 hours before a match to allow food to empty from the stomach. Frequently, the interval between games may be too close to digest a standard high-carbohydrate meal. In that case, athletes are wise to select easy-to-digest, carbohydrate-rich foods and beverages that will provide quick energy for the next match.

Try combining several of the items below:

- Energy, fruit, or low-fat granola or cereal bars
- Fresh fruit
- Fruit yogurt
- Bagels, muffins, cereal mixes with dried fruit and nuts
- Whole-grain bread with honey, jam, or fruit butters (apple butter/pumpkin butter)

If an athlete feels uncomfortable eating solid food between matches, consider these convenient liquid options:

- Carbohydrate-rich drinks
- Liquid meals
- Low-fat fruit and yogurt smoothies

If a soccer team can meet the challenge of supplying enough fluid and nutrition throughout the tournament, the opportunities for success are great!

