Matchday Nutrition Guide

NUTRITION & HYDRATION

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FUEL | HYDRATE | RECOVER

1 THE MATCHDAY GOAL

Help young players arrive comfortably fuelled, well hydrated and ready to play - without making food complicated. Regular balanced meals across the week matter more than any single matchday meal.

EARLY KICK-OFF: PRACTICAL OPTIONS

- If there is little time after waking, choose a familiar light breakfast: toast, cereal, porridge, banana, yoghurt, or a small smoothie.
- For players who tolerate food well, a slightly larger breakfast can include eggs, toast, cereal, yoghurt and fruit.
- Avoid experimenting with new foods, very greasy meals or large portions immediately before playing.

LATER KICK-OFF: PRACTICAL OPTIONS

- Base the main pre-match meal around familiar carbohydrate foods such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, cereal or fruit.
- Include a moderate protein source such as yoghurt, milk, eggs, chicken, fish, beans or similar family foods.
- Keep very fatty, spicy or unusually high-fibre foods modest if they tend to cause stomach discomfort.

2 SIMPLE TIMING GUIDE

- **Several hours before:** normal balanced meal if practical.
- **About 1-2 hours before:** small familiar snack if hungry - banana, yoghurt, cereal bar, toast, fruit, small sandwich.
- **Just before warm-up:** focus on fluids; only a small easy-to-digest snack if the player genuinely needs it.
- **After the match:** offer fluids plus a meal or snack containing carbohydrate and protein.

3 MATCHDAY HYDRATION

- Encourage players to begin the day hydrated rather than trying to catch up at kick-off.
- Water is the usual first choice for most youth training and matches.
- Provide regular drink opportunities before, during and after activity, especially in warm or humid conditions.
- For prolonged vigorous activity, heavy sweating or tournament schedules, an electrolyte-containing drink may sometimes be useful.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: familiar foods + regular fluids + no last-minute experiments.

4 COACH / PARENT CHECKLIST

- Player has eaten something suitable for the time of kick-off.
- Water bottle is filled and clearly labelled.
- Snacks are available for long travel, delays or multiple games.
- Food allergies and dietary requirements are known and planned for.
- Players are never pressured to eat large amounts immediately before playing.

5 EVIDENCE BASE

General principles align with American Academy of Pediatrics guidance on youth sports nutrition and hydration, together with FIFA football nutrition guidance. Water is generally appropriate for shorter activity; longer or hotter sessions may justify additional carbohydrate/electrolyte support depending on the individual.

This resource provides general nutrition and hydration guidance for young players and is not individual medical or dietetic advice. Needs vary with age, growth, health, allergies, activity level and conditions. Parents and clubs should seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional or registered dietitian where appropriate.