Matchday Nutrition Guide

NUTRITION & HYDRATION - COACH GUIDANCE

NUTRITION & HYDRATION

PLAN | FUEL | HYDRATE | RECOVER

WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

Matchday nutrition helps young players arrive with enough energy to perform, concentrate and enjoy the game. The aim is not to create a complicated meal plan, but to encourage familiar foods, regular eating and sensible timing around kick-off.

1 PURPOSE

Use the guide to help players and families understand what a practical matchday eating routine can look like. It should support energy, comfort and concentration without turning food into another source of pressure.

2 WHEN TO USE IT

- Share before the season, tournaments or busy fixture periods.
- Use when players regularly arrive hungry, skip breakfast or rely on sweets and fizzy drinks before games.

3 HOW TO USE THE FORM

Use the form as a conversation aid rather than a strict diet plan. Encourage players to choose familiar, easy-to-digest foods and to plan backwards from kick-off. For early games, a realistic breakfast or snack is often more useful than advice based on a large meal several hours beforehand.

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A regular meal or snack pattern rather than long gaps without food.
- Carbohydrate-rich foods that the player already tolerates well, with moderate protein and limited heavy, greasy or very high-fibre foods immediately before play.
- Water available before, during and after the match.

5 WHAT TO DO NEXT

Ask players and families to identify two or three reliable matchday options that work for them. Adjust for kick-off time, travel and individual tolerance rather than expecting every player to eat the same foods.

COACH TIP

For young players, consistency usually matters more than perfection. A familiar breakfast such as cereal and milk, toast, yoghurt, fruit or a simple sandwich may be far more realistic for an early kick-off than a formal pre-match meal.

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Hydration for Young Players

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WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

Young players can become dehydrated during training and matches, particularly in warm weather, long sessions or tournaments. Coaches can help by making drinking easy, normal and regular rather than waiting until a player is visibly struggling.

1 PURPOSE

Use the guide to establish simple hydration habits: arrive reasonably hydrated, drink at sensible opportunities, and replace fluids after activity. The form is intended to support awareness, not to prescribe an exact volume for every child.

2 WHEN TO USE IT

- Use throughout the season and reinforce during hot weather, indoor sessions, tournaments and double-session days.
- Revisit if players frequently report headaches, unusual fatigue, dizziness, dry mouth or very dark urine.

3 HOW TO USE THE FORM

Build drink breaks into the session plan and ensure bottles are easy to access. Water should usually be the default drink. For prolonged or unusually intense activity, individual needs may differ and parents may wish to seek guidance from a qualified sports dietitian or healthcare professional.

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Players arriving with a drink bottle and using it regularly.
- Signs that a player may need a break: unusual fatigue, dizziness, headache, confusion, cramping or feeling unwell.
- Environmental factors such as heat, humidity, heavy kit and repeated games.

5 WHAT TO DO NEXT

Agree simple team habits: bring a labelled bottle, drink before activity, use planned breaks and refill when necessary. Escalate persistent symptoms or concerns to parents/guardians and appropriate healthcare professionals.

COACH TIP

Do not use thirst alone as the team's hydration strategy. Make short drink opportunities part of normal coaching practice, especially with younger players who may become absorbed in the activity.

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Pre-Training Fuel

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WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

Players often arrive at training straight from school, travel or other activities. A small, familiar snack beforehand can help prevent low energy and poor concentration, especially when there has been a long gap since the previous meal.

1 PURPOSE

Use the guide to help players plan a practical pre-training snack or meal that suits the timing of the session. The aim is adequate energy and comfort, not a rigid menu.

2 WHEN TO USE IT

- Useful for after-school and evening training, long travel days and players who regularly report hunger before sessions.
- Share with parents when training times make normal family meals difficult.

3 HOW TO USE THE FORM

Encourage a normal meal when there is enough time, or a smaller snack when training is closer. Players should use foods they know they tolerate well. Examples can include fruit, toast, cereal, yoghurt, a simple sandwich, a bagel or similar everyday foods.

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Long gaps between lunch and training.
- Players arriving hungry, lethargic or unable to concentrate.
- Large, rich or unfamiliar foods immediately before intense activity that may cause discomfort.

5 WHAT TO DO NEXT

Ask each player to identify a few realistic options they can keep at home, take to school or eat while travelling. Encourage families to test routines on normal training days rather than experimenting before important matches.

COACH TIP

The best pre-training option is one the player will actually eat, can digest comfortably and can fit into their school and family routine.

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Post-Match Recovery Nutrition

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WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

After training or a match, young players need to return to normal eating and drinking. Recovery nutrition should support refuelling, rehydration and normal growth rather than becoming a complicated supplement routine.

1 PURPOSE

Use the guide to encourage a sensible recovery routine built around normal meals and snacks containing carbohydrate, protein and fluids.

2 WHEN TO USE IT

- Most useful after matches, hard training, tournaments and days when another session or match follows soon afterwards.
- Reinforce when players routinely finish activity and then go several hours without eating or drinking.

3 HOW TO USE THE FORM

Encourage players to drink after activity and eat a normal meal when one is available. If a meal will be delayed, use a convenient snack such as milk or yoghurt with fruit, a sandwich, cereal with milk, or another familiar combination of carbohydrate and protein.

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Whether a proper meal is available soon after the session.
- Whether the player has another match or training session later that day or the next morning.
- Signs of poor recovery such as persistent fatigue, low appetite, illness or repeated soreness that should be discussed with parents/guardians and appropriate professionals.

5 WHAT TO DO NEXT

Help families plan the journey home: where the player will eat, what drink will be available and what simple snack can be packed if the main meal is delayed.

COACH TIP

Recovery does not require expensive powders or special products. For most young players, ordinary food, fluids, sleep and appropriate rest are the foundation.

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Tournament Day Nutrition & Hydration

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WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

Tournament days are different from a single match because players may have repeated games, uncertain schedules, travel and long periods between fixtures. Planning food and drink in advance reduces the temptation to rely on whatever happens to be available at the venue.

1 PURPOSE

Use the guide to help coaches and families plan a simple tournament-day routine that maintains energy and hydration while avoiding heavy eating immediately before repeated games.

2 WHEN TO USE IT

- Use before festivals, showcases, tournaments and any day involving multiple matches or extended time at a venue.
- Share in advance so families can pack suitable food and drinks rather than making decisions on the day.

3 HOW TO USE THE FORM

Plan around the schedule. Start with a normal breakfast, bring water and a selection of familiar snacks, and use larger meals when there is a longer break. Between closely spaced games, favour smaller, easy-to-digest foods rather than heavy meals.

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Length of breaks between games and access to food, shade and refill points.
- Weather, travel time and the total length of the day.
- Players becoming tired, irritable, unusually quiet, dizzy or unwell - these should not simply be dismissed as poor effort.

5 WHAT TO DO NEXT

Send families a simple packing reminder before the event. Build planned drink and snack opportunities into the team's schedule and make sure players have time to eat rather than rushing straight from one activity to another.

COACH TIP

A tournament food bag is useful: water, familiar carbohydrate-rich snacks, a simple protein option and a more substantial meal for a longer break. Avoid introducing unfamiliar foods or supplements on competition day.

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