

Performance Playbook



gssiweb.org

Basketball: Better Nutrition Equals Better Hoops

JULIE BURNS, M.S., R.D., CCN, is the founder of SportFuel, Inc. and Eat Like the Pros, LLC.

Basketball is a highly intense sport that requires its players to have speed, agility, and power throughout the game. The peak energy level needed for basketball can be maximized with good hydration and nutrition pre- and post-court.

Promote Hydration — “The 3 Pointer”

A common cause of early fatigue during exercise is dehydration. Each athlete should have his or her own individual sports bottle. Drinking cool, flavored fluids, like sports drinks, encourages more drinking and helps athletes replenish fluid losses. Research shows that losing as little as 2% of body weight (ex: 3 lbs for a 150-lb athlete) can affect a player’s performance. In fact, when playing at a 2% level of dehydration, players can experience a 10% to 15% decrease in shooting percentage during a game.¹

Pre-Court Fuel

Basketball players need guidance on what to eat before they train or compete. The pre-event meal is important because it keeps the athletes from feeling hungry, helps the athletes prepare mentally for competition, and provides fuel and fluids to the muscles. Each athlete needs to experiment to identify which foods feel best, both physically and mentally. Here are a few tips to consider when planning a pre-event meal:

- Eat familiar foods. Never try a new food on a game day. Experiment with foods only on practice days.
- Athletes should try to eat 2 to 4 hours before the game to give their body enough time to digest the food. The closer the athlete eats to the game or practice, the smaller the meal should be.
- Include a balanced amount of carbohydrate-rich foods along with protein and healthy fats. Good carbohydrate choices include whole-grain bagels, breads, fruits, and whole-food energy

bars. These foods tend to be easily digested by most athletes.

- For staying power and balance, include some protein-containing foods with high-carbohydrate foods at the pre-event meal. Examples include slices of turkey, chicken, beef, fish, and nuts.
- If an athlete tends to experience stomach problems, eating smaller, more frequent meals will help. Some athletes tolerate liquid meals, such as a nutrition shake, better than they tolerate solid foods.

Once athletes have finished their pre-game meal, they should sip fluids during the period leading up to the game to help ensure that they begin play well-hydrated.

Recovering From the Court

Replace muscle energy stores after a game or practice with high-carbohydrate foods along with some protein in the form of a meal or recovery shake. This should be done as soon as possible and ideally within 30 minutes after a practice or a game.

Ideally, athletes will weigh in and out pre- and post-exercise. Along with fuel, fluids must be replaced post-exercise. Research suggests that 20 to 24 oz. of fluids per pound of weight lost due to sweat needs to be consumed to get the player back to base line.² Some athletes will also require additional salt and minerals. Adopting these two simple post-exercise recovery strategies will help maximize the athlete’s ability to train and compete at his or her best.



¹Dougherty K, et al. Two percent dehydration impairs, and six percent carbohydrate drink improves boys’ basketball skills. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 38:1650-1658, 2006. ²Sawka MN, et al. Exercise and fluid replacement. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 39:377-390, 2007.