

**EAT-TO-WIN!**by **Caroline Mandel, MS, RD**

Mary is a 12-year-old swimmer. Since starting swimming at age 7, Mary has been told many different things about what to eat and drink to be a better athlete. One year she was told to not eat before practice and that water breaks were not allowed. The next year, she was told to eat an after school snack and carry a water bottle to practice. Confused? So is Mary!

Many athletes skip breakfast, eat pizza and French fries for lunch, and go straight to afternoon workouts feeling tired and thirsty. How can a busy athlete eat better to feel and perform better? Follow these tips so that you can EAT-TO-WIN!

- 1. Start each day with breakfast.** Bread, cereal, fruit, and milk contain CARBOHYDRATE, the fuel of choice for both your muscles and brain. Try cereal and fruit with low-fat or fat-free milk, or maybe peanut butter and jelly on toast with yogurt and 100% juice.
- 2. Carry a water bottle and stay hydrated.** When your body needs fluid you feel tired and you may even get a headache or muscle cramps. Fluids help your body to stay cool when your muscles are working hard. Water, fat-free or low-fat milk, or 100% fruit juice (in moderate amounts), are good choices at meals and snacks. Bring a bottle of water or sports drink to practice so you can drink before, during, and after exercise. You'll know that you are hydrated when your urine is light in color.
- 3. Refuse to skip meals.** Skipping meals can cause you to run out of energy, make you feel over-hungry, and may lead to poor food choices. Plan to eat every 3 to 4 hours to fuel your body and brain to perform well in both school and sports.
- 4. Refuel after exercise.** Eating a meal or snack immedi-

**Sample Meal Plan**

Breakfast: Cereal, fruit, milk, juice

Snack: Crackers, water

Lunch: Turkey sandwich, fruit, yogurt, water

Snack: Cereal bar, juice

Practice: Water

Dinner: Spaghetti with meat sauce, salad, milk

Snack: Yogurt with fruit, water

cately after practice helps your body to get ready for tomorrow. Choose pasta, rice, potato, bread or cereal, some protein (beef, pork, poultry, fish, beans, soy, milk or yogurt), vegetables, fruits, and plenty of fluids.

- 5. Listen to your body.** Eat when you feel hungry and stop when satisfied. You'll know that you are hungry when you run out of energy and feel empty. You're satisfied when a few more bites would make you feel full. It is normal to eat more on some days and less on others.

Eat smart every day. Good nutrition isn't just for athletes during the playing season. Smart teens will always start with a good breakfast, stay hydrated, and listen to their bodies... you get the idea!

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This patient education sheet is distributed in conjunction with the February 2004 issue of *Adolescent Health Update*, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Comments and suggestions on *Nutrition Notes* should be forwarded to Marc Jacobson, MD FAAP (jacobson@lij.edu).

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*Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from the Nestlé Nutrition Institute™*