



# Play Ball! Tips for the Weekend Baseball Warrior

By Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, CSSD

You are just a forkful and water bottle away from boosting your baseball performance! Smart food choices and proper hydration can enhance reaction time, focus and stamina to give a competitive edge on the field. Although baseball is not a sport of continuous activity, the games are long so a smart nutrition plan will help you mentally and physically stay in the game. Here's a game plan on how to eat for energy and hydrate for high performance:

## PRE-GAME PREPARATION

### Food

Three to four hours before the game, eat a balanced meal. A good rule of thumb is to have  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate for whole grains such as whole grain bread, pasta or brown rice,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate for lean protein such as eggs, fish, beans or chicken and the last  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the plate for colorful produce. Keep meals on the healthy side since high fat meals such as fried chicken or a cheeseburger and fries can lead to feeling weighed down and sluggish.

#### Example meals:

- Whole grain toast with a vegetable omelet and chopped fresh fruit
- Oatmeal (made with low-fat milk) with almonds and a banana
- Sandwich made with grilled BBQ chicken on a whole grain bun and a spinach salad

Between 30 minutes and one hour before the game, eat a piece of fruit such as a banana, apple, orange or grapes.

### Fluids

Water is the most important nutrient for baseball players. Not staying properly hydrated can lead to muscle cramps, joint pain, fatigue, headaches, slow reaction time and decreased concentration. These are general guidelines to help you get started.

Adjust for personal needs.

- Two hours before the game, drink at least 16 ounces of water.
- 15 minutes before the game have another 8 ounces of water.

## DURING GAME HYDRATION IS IMPORTANT

- Stay well hydrated by drinking about 4 to 8 ounces of fluid every 15 minutes. Don't rely on thirst to alert you about when you should drink since at that point dehydration is already setting in. Instead, use sports bottles with ounces clearly marked to keep the right hydration pace through the game.
- Start with water but then after about 1 hour of playing and sweating switch to a sport drink. Sports drinks provide electrolytes such as sodium that are lost in sweat and also carbohydrates to replenish muscle energy.
- Special note to pitchers and catchers: These positions usually need more fluids and sports drinks since catchers wear heavy equipment and pitchers are in continuous movement.

## POST-GAME RECOVERY PLAN

### Food

Within about 30 minutes after the game, eat a snack with protein and carbohydrate. This combination will help repair muscles and replenish energy stores.

#### Example snacks:

- $\frac{1}{2}$  whole grain peanut butter sandwich and low-fat chocolate milk
- Smoothie with low-fat milk or yogurt and frozen fruit
- String cheese and apple

### Fluids

To see how much fluid you need, weigh yourself before and after games. For every one pound of weight lost, drink 16 to 24 ounces of water. Losing weight after a game is not a good thing since this is a sign of dehydration. Make it a priority to increase the amount of fluid during future games.

See a registered dietitian for more sports performance questions.

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*Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, CSSD, LDN is a Registered Dietitian and author of The Flexitarian Diet. She is the nutrition consultant for the Chicago Cubs, has a regular TV segment on NBC Chicago, teaches healthy cooking classes and blogs for USA Today and Huffington Post.*