

SA Academy – Nutrition Information

Taking part in all-star cheerleading is very demanding of the body and its energy stores and without a healthy diet, athletes will begin to breakdown physically. It is important that our athletes understand how detrimental a bad diet is to both their training and performance levels at competition. Without a proper diet, athletes will lose energy more quickly and will be more prone to injuries. We have been made aware by numerous parents that our young athletes are becoming very body conscious and have taken on unhealthy eating habits. I have also on numerous occasions witnessed athletes eating unhealthy foods at competitions and training, as well as sugary drinks, which will seriously impact their ability to perform at their optimum potential. In putting together this nutritional information pack, we hope that it helps both our athletes and parents understand the necessity for planning a diet that will contribute to their athletic performance.

Nutrition and strength and conditioning work together to help the athlete become well rounded. In today's society, eating appropriately is difficult but I refer to the body as a brand new car. When you purchase a brand new car that requires high octane gas, you will not put diesel in it. It is the same thing for an athlete preparing for a competition or performance. The optimal diet would be to eliminate any fast food, foods that are high in fat, junk food, or food that does not offer nutritious value. The best philosophy to use is moderation and regardless of your situation and surroundings, it is making wise decisions that make a difference.

Cheerleaders SHOULD eat healthy but shouldn't worry about being overly skinny. It's important to be at a healthy weight with muscle to support the skills you are attempting to do. Here are some suggestions for healthy foods to eat before, during and after your cheer practices:

BEFORE PRACTICE:

- It is important not to go into a practice hungry
- Eating carbohydrates like whole grain pastas and breads, raw veggies, and fruits are good choices, easily digested and keep the muscles energized.
- Dairy products can make you feel nauseated when working out hard so avoid those prior to your workout.

- Give yourself ample time between your meal and your workout.
- Sugary drinks such as sodas, coffee drinks and candy aren't a good idea and will give you instant energy but then you will find yourself go flat quickly.
- Definitely avoid heavy fried foods, anything extra greasy or overly cheesy should not be eaten.
- Water is a must before practice!

DURING PRACTICE:

- Bring a large insulated jug of water to practice and drink it before, during, and after practice so you can avoid being dehydrated.
- Food really doesn't need to be eaten during one to three hour practices. If you're incredibly hungry snack on some raw walnuts, almonds, a protein bar or fruit but avoid sweets, sugary drinks or heavy protein.
- If you have a longer practice drink a sports drink to replenish lost fluids. (See below for info on sports drinks).

AFTER PRACTICE:

- Continue to drink lots of water.
- This is the best time to combine some proteins with carbohydrates to feed your exhausted muscles.
- It's important to eat within two hours of your workout to keep your metabolism going fast and to avoid the breakdown of muscles.
- Whole grain carbs will replenish energy if you had an extra-long practice.
- Fill up on veggies and fruits which are always a healthy choice!

Nutrition leading up to a competition:

You've poured your blood, sweat and tears into practicing a cheer routine over and over again for the upcoming cheerleading competition. You are physically ready to dance, tumble, stunt and perform your heart out to get that first place trophy. But have you put much thought into your diet the week of competition down to the actual day? This is a surprising detail that a lot of cheerleading teams dismiss as they do not understand the importance of nutrition and how it will affect them when they perform.

So what does your body need the week of competition and how do you get it?

Your body will need the maximum amount of stored energy that it can pull from when you are putting your all into the routine. Think of your body as a car that needs to fuel up before a long drive. You need to fill up your glycogen stores for the maximum amount of endurance and energy by increasing the amount of carbohydrates in your body. Your food amount intake should remain the same as you usually eat. However, you should be eating complex carbohydrate foods with low glycemic indexing. Examples of complex carbs include wheat pastas, wheat breads, healthy cereals, and baked potatoes. Increase the amount of complex carbohydrates, decrease the amount of high protein foods such as fish, eggs, and meat, and try to minimize the amount of fat intake. These foods should be proportioned into small meals or snacks every two to three hours.

Nutrition on the day of a Competition:

It's easy to get stressed before the big competition and either be too stressed to eat or eat too much. Both will throw off your cheer performance completely and effect your outcome of winning dramatically. It's important to remember that what you're putting into your body that entire week leading up to the competition will either be a disadvantage or a game turning advantage.

Breakfast:

The slogan "Breakfast of Champions" is not a joke; breakfast is the basis of your day and the fuel you need to get your day started. Make time for a healthy breakfast, since your body has typically been without food for 10 or more hours and needs some energy to get going. If you skip breakfast, it increases your chances of overeating later in the day. Planning and preparation is the key to success. For those of you that are competing early in the morning, make sure you have a dinner with a high carbohydrate quantity the night before the event and eat something light in the morning, such as a cereal bar or fruit. Also make sure you take on plenty of water so that you do not become dehydrated quickly.

What does your body need the day of cheer competition and how do you get it?

- The day of competition, you'll want to keep up the complex carbohydrate intake in small meals or snacks, while keeping your intake on fibre, fat, and protein low. You can choose from wheat bread, healthy cereals, oatmeal, fruits, fruit juices, plain crackers, boiled rice, potatoes, pasta, muffins, and carbohydrate drinks that have high electrolytes.

What about right after the competition?

- After the competition, your energy level will be low and your glycogen stores will be used up. You'll want to eat something that will raise your blood sugar levels up quickly. Foods that are higher on the glycemic index such as watermelon, potatoes, brown rice, bagels, etc., are perfect for raising your blood sugar.

Here's the 5 main points to consider when planning your diet for practice and competition:

1. Load Up on Carbohydrates

Carbs are an athlete's main fuel. Your body changes them to glucose, a form of sugar, and stores it in your muscles as glycogen.

When you exercise, your body changes glycogen into energy. If you exercise for under 90 minutes, you have enough glycogen in your muscles, even for high-intensity activities. But if your workout is longer than that, use these strategies:

- Carbohydrate loading for 3 or 4 days before an event can help top up your glycogen stores.
- Eat a diet that gets about 70% of its calories from carbohydrates, including breads, cereals, pasta, fruit, and vegetables, to achieve maximum carbohydrate storage.
- On the day of a big event, eat your last meal 3 to 4 hours before exercising, to give your stomach time to empty.
- Avoid eating sugary or starchy foods within 30 minutes of starting an activity; they can speed up dehydration.

- Replenish carbs, minerals, and water during long exercise sessions. Eat a snack and drink fluid every 15 to 20 minutes. Refined carbohydrates (with sugar or flour) pass quickly into the bloodstream, where they fuel working muscles. Many athletes prefer sports bars, sports drinks, or gels, since they're so convenient. But fruit and fruit juice are also excellent choices.
- Reload on carbohydrates after intensive exercise, too. Since you don't need quick energy, it's best to choose less refined carbohydrates, such as a whole-grain bagel or carrot sticks, which provide both carbohydrates and a rich array of nutrients.

2. Get Enough Protein, But Not Too Much

Protein doesn't provide a lot of fuel for energy. But you need it to maintain your muscles.

- Know what you need. The average person needs 1.2 to 1.4 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight a day. That's about 88 grams of protein for a 150-pound person. A strength athlete may need up to 1.7 grams per kilogram of body weight. That's about 150 grams of protein for a 200-pound athlete.
- Getting too much protein can put a strain on your kidneys. Instead of protein supplements, eat high-quality protein, such as lean meats, fish, poultry, nuts, beans, eggs, or milk.
- Drink up. Milk is one of the best foods for recovery after an event, because it provides a good balance of protein and carbohydrates. Milk also has both casein and whey protein. The combination may be particularly helpful for athletes. Research shows that whey protein is absorbed quickly, which can help speed recovery immediately after an event. Casein is digested more slowly, helping to ensure long-term recovery of muscle after a grueling event. Milk also has calcium, which is important for maintaining strong bones

3. Go Easy on Fat

- For long events, such as marathons, your body turns to fat for energy when carbohydrate sources run low.
- Most athletes get all the fat they need by following the basic dietary guideline to eat mostly unsaturated fat from foods such as nuts, avocados, olives, vegetable oils, and fatty fish like salmon and tuna.
- Avoid fatty foods on the day of an event, since they can upset your stomach.

4. Drink Fluids Early and Often

- Intense exercise, especially in hot weather, can quickly leave you dehydrated. Dehydration, in turn, can hurt your performance and, in extreme cases, threaten your life.
- All high-intensity athletes should drink fluids early and often. Don't wait until you're thirsty. By the time you feel parched, you may be seriously dehydrated.

5. Replace Lost Electrolytes

Sweating removes both fluids and electrolytes. Electrolytes help transmit nerve signals in your body. To replenish them, reach for sports drinks. If you're also losing a lot of fluid as you sweat, dilute sports drinks with equal amounts of water to get the best balance of fluid and electrolytes.

We would also recommend that you have a look in Holland and Barrett, who sell a good range of sports nutrition. We recommend that you try and avoid sports drinks such as 'Powerade' and 'Lucozade' as they are manufactured by 'Coca Cola' and 'Pepsi', and are therefore full of sugar. Instead you could try some of the gels for electrolyte and carbohydrate replenishment from Holland and Barrett, as well as their range of snack bars for an energy boost on comp day.

In conclusion, remember that what you put into your body the week of your cheerleading competition will help determine the outcome of your scores. Eat healthy complex carbohydrates, less protein and fat in small meals every couple of hours, and you'll have plenty of healthy energy to pull you through the performance.