



Sport-Specific Nutrition: Baseball

by Jen DeWall RDN, CSSD, LD. Board-Certified Sports Dietitian



Jen works with ICyF to provide expert advice on sports nutrition and healthy eating to the students and families of Indianola. As a board-certified sports dietitian, Jen owns a private practice that focuses on helping athletes stay on the cutting edge with superior nutrition to enhance performance with safety and efficacy.

Baseball players can have some of the most demanding schedules in sports. Schedules often involve many practices and games on consecutive days. General fitness is important with anaerobic power and quick reaction time being essential. It is difficult for a baseball player to perform at his peak without good, consistent nutrition on a daily basis.

Nutrition Recommendations for Baseball Players

• Focus on clean eating

Baseball players need to be well conditioned and in good physical shape. Due to energy demands and a high strength-to-weight ratio there is little room for high-fat, high-sugar foods. Fried foods, soda, candy and packaged cakes and cookies should be limited, if not completely avoided. Clean eating is critical to helping you achieve the proper balance of strength, power, agility and speed.

Your snacks and carbohydrate intake should be timed appropriately before and after trainings to maximize performance and promote faster recovery without added calories. A list of snack ideas before training can be found on the ICyF “On the Go Snacks for Athletes” guide.

Additionally, it is important to select lean cuts of meat, low-fat and fat free dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole grain products that are good sources of fiber to promote satiety. A more detailed list of products can be found on the ICyF “Athlete Shopping List” guide.

• Find your optimal percent body fat for performance

While most athletes talk about losing weight, what they actually want to achieve is a decrease in body fat. Due to differences in physical demands of baseball players, pitchers and catchers will tend to be heavier than

infielders. Outfielders are typically the leanest individuals. However, these are general guidelines. Everyone must find what body composition works best for them to be an optimal player.

The true goal is to lose body fat while preserving muscle mass. Body weight is a poor measure of the amount of fat we carry and changes measured on the scales do not necessarily reflect changes in body fat stores. Using a variety of pre-determined measurement sites for testing body composition will provide a better overall picture of changes.

When aiming to lower body fat, there are no quick fixes that are sustainable. A long-term approach is required to lower body fat levels while maintaining the ability to train effectively. Therefore, changes in body composition are meant to be done in the off-season. The ultimate goal is to adjust your energy balance between calorie intake and your off-season fitness routine. Work with a sports dietitian/nutritionist to create an ideal food plan to fit your individual needs.

• Stay hydrated

Hydration before, during and after training and game-time should be well planned, especially given the typical summertime climate. Drinking large amounts of water in the minutes beforehand is not an optimal way to hydrate and can leave you with a “sloshy” stomach in the opening minutes of play. Dehydration (2-3% loss in body weight (1) or just a bit over 3 pounds for a 165-pound player) can slow pace and decrease reaction time. Players should sip small amounts of fluid during training and regularly throughout the day.

Hydration Tips



- Start hydrating about 4 hours before practice or competitions so that you are able to excrete any excess fluid as urine before you compete.
- If you are training for 60+ minutes, sip 4-6 ounces fluid every 15 minutes. A sports drink may be necessary.
- On days where you are training intensely, for every pound lost, replace with 24 ounces of fluid.
- Carry a water bottle with you during the day to help achieve your fluid goals. One sip of water is equal to about 1 ounce.

Hydration during practices and games is also critical. If you are playing for more than 60 minutes then a sports beverage may be needed. Sports beverages can allow you

to keep your blood sugar levels within normal limits to allow for immediate energy and split-second decision making. Your brain relies on glucose for its primary fuel source. Without (glucose,) your blood sugar can drop and cause impaired mental acuity.

In order to play at your optimal level, clean eating, a healthy weight and hydration are your secret weapons to winning. For more information or a personalized plan, work with a registered dietitian/nutritionist that is board certified in sports dietetics.

NOTE: Proper fueling for peak performance and general health is a critical part of the athlete's equation. If you have questions, concerns or would like a sports specific nutrition and hydration plan, please contact Jen DeWall RDN, CSSD, LD to schedule a complimentary 15-minute sports nutrition coaching call.

Email: jdewall@nutritioninmotion.info

Call/text: 515.343.7241

nutritioninmotion.info

References

1. Position of the American Dietetic Association, Dietitians of Canada, and the American College of Sports Medicine: Nutrition and Athletic Performance. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, March 2009, Volume 109 Number 3 p. 509-522.