

## **Sports Nutrition - Vital for Athletic Success**

An interview with Lilah Al-Masri, MS, RD, LD, Sports Dietitian

**Q: Why is nutrition so important to an athlete's performance on the game field or practice field?**

**A:** *It is vital that an athlete properly fuel their body. You would not expect a car to work without the right type of gas; similarly you cannot expect your body to run efficiently without the right fuel (foods/fluids) either. **Eating the right foods and consuming the right fluids at the right time can help the athlete achieve their peak performance!***

**Q: Why is proper nutrition important for an athlete prior to a game and some general suggested foods that make sense to consider an hour or two before a game?**

**A:** *Fueling properly before practice or game is imperative to an athlete's performance. An athlete must "top off" their energy stores by consuming a high carbohydrate snack prior to practice or competition. Ensuring that the snack is high in carbohydrates, (not high in protein or fat) is important since carbohydrates are quickly converted to energy that the body can use to fuel sports activity. Examples include, fruit, granola bars, raisins, pretzels and bagels.*

**Q: Why is proper nutrition important for an athlete after a game and some general suggested foods that make sense to consider within an hour of a game for recovery purposes?**

**A:** *Post-workout and/or post-competition, it is crucial for an athlete consume a snack that is high in carbohydrates and moderate in protein within 30 minutes. The 30 minute time window is important to help decrease recovery time. Meaning, an athlete will be able to recover faster from one workout to the next. Examples include flavored low-fat milk, peanut butter & jelly sandwich, cereal & milk, and trail mix.\**

*\*It is important for the athlete and coach to understand that even with the right type, amount and timing of your nutrition it will take the body approximately 20-22 hrs to fully recover its energy stores.*

**Q: If an athlete has a tournament and plays 2-3 games in a single day, what foods might make sense for their recovery but also for fuel to play in their games?**

**A:** *Many athletes forget to re-fuel during tournament play which usually results in fatigue, decreased performance and increased potential for injury. Time in between games varies and therefore what is consumed must vary as well. If there is only one hour between games, an athlete might want to consume a small snack such as a granola bar and a piece of fruit. If there are 3-5 hours between games, the athlete will be able to tolerate a much bigger snack, such as a peanut butter sandwich, piece of fruit and chocolate milk. The amount of food and fluids consumed will vary dependent upon the sport, size of the athlete, environmental conditions, etc. Developing nutrition strategies with a Registered Dietitian is important to ensure all the athlete's needs are being met.*

**Q: Regarding proper nutrition and foods to consider, when is the best time to eat before and after a game?**

**A:**

- ⊕ *30-60 minutes prior to competition an athlete should consume a snack high in carbohydrates.*
- ⊕ *Within 30 minutes post-workout or competition an athlete should consume a snack high in carbohydrates and moderate in protein.*

**Q: Proper hydration before, during and after a game. What are suggested beverages to consider?**

**A:** *Being adequately hydrated is a must! Athletes who do not properly hydrate on and off the field are shown to perform poorly both mentally and physically. Sports drinks, such as Gatorade, should be consumed during the sport only. During the day, water, milk and juices are good sources of hydration. Calorie beverages, though, are not recommended in large amounts for some athletes.*

*Hydration Guidelines:*

- ⊕ *Drink 16oz (2 cups) of fluids 2 hours prior to exercise.*
- ⊕ *Drink 4-8oz per hour of exercise (sport intensity and environmental conditions may have an effect on how much is consumed).*
- ⊕ *Drink 16-24oz (2-3 cups) of fluids for every pound lost. Weight loss should be minimal. If you find that you lose several pounds during a workout, seek advice from a Registered Dietitian to help you create a hydration plan.*

**Q: Is there any other advice that you feel would benefit the athlete's?**

**A:** *An athlete must be careful and realize that not all foods are created equal. The athlete must understand that there is not just one "super food" that will allow him/her to optimally perform. Seeking guidance from a Registered Dietitian, one that specializes in Sports Nutrition Coaching, can help the athlete get on track to being the best possible performer he/she can be. The information will help you reach your academic and athletic goals. You can find a Registered Dietitian in your area by viewing the SCAN website, <http://www.scandpg.org/mapsearch.php>.*

*Lilah Al-Masri, MS, RD, LD and Simon Bartlett, PhD, CSCS, ATC are co-owners of Quest Sports Science Center (located in Annapolis, MD). Quest Sports Science Center's mission is to provide athletes of all levels and ages an opportunity to reach their optimal athletic performance by providing physiological testing, sports nutrition coaching and strength and conditioning program development. Lilah and Simon have also written several quick reference guides on the Fundamentals of Sports Nutrition for Lacrosse, Cycling and Water Polo. For more information on this book and about the services Quest Sports Science Center offers, please call 410-626-1566 or visit [www.questssc.com](http://www.questssc.com).*

## BIOGRAPHY

Lilah Al-Masri has a Master's Degree in Clinical Nutrition from Boston University, a Bachelor's Degree in Biology from Villanova University and completed a fellowship in Adolescent Medicine and Eating Disorders at Children's Hospital Boston. She currently is a Registered Dietitian, holds a license in the State of Maryland and is the head Sports Dietitian at the United States Naval Academy. Lilah is also a highly sought after public speaker for sports nutrition education and has presented the information to numerous summer sports camps. She was integral in designing and implementing the sports nutrition program for the Women's World Cup Lacrosse tournament held in Annapolis in 2005. Additionally, she is a private pediatric consultant, specializing in weight management and sports nutrition. Lilah's pursuit for the very best information and implementation in sports nutrition began while she was a student-athlete at Villanova. She earned two All-American honors and three All-Conference honors, for the women's water polo team. She continued her post-collegiate water polo career as a Division I coach. She continues to be involved in master's water polo, triathlons, open water swims and running events. In the 2005 Chesapeake Bay Swim Challenge, Lilah finished first in the 26-29 year old age group and in the 2006 Challenge, Lilah finished first in the 30-34 year old age group.



**Medical Disclaimer: When making serious decisions about exercise or dietary programs, please consult with a physician, dietitian and/or coach, as well as with your parent/guardian if you are a minor.**