

In-Season vs. Off-Season Nutrition for Student-Athletes

Whether you are a student-athlete or a professional, your nutrition plays a key role in athletic performance, recovery, and long-term health. Your needs will shift depending on whether you're in-season or off-season. Understanding how and why can help you fuel smarter all year long.



IN-SEASON NUTRITION: FUEL TO PERFORM

Primary Goals: Support energy, recovery, performance, and injury prevention

- **Energy Needs Increase:** With frequent practices and games, you'll need more energy—especially from carbohydrates (fruits, whole grains, rice, pasta) to keep your glycogen (fuel) stores topped off.
- **Protein Intake:** Include high-quality protein at meals and snacks (chicken, beef, fish, Greek yogurt, eggs, tofu, beans) to support muscle repair and recovery.
- **Hydration Strategy:** Begin the day well-hydrated and continue drinking fluids throughout practices and competitions. For longer events or hot weather, include electrolyte-rich beverages.
- **Timing Matters:** Fuel up 1–3 hours before activity with a balanced meal and refuel within 30–60 minutes post-exercise. This should be a high carbohydrate, moderate protein meal or snack.

OFF-SEASON NUTRITION: BUILD, GROW, RESET

- **Slightly Lower Energy Needs:** Energy needs may decrease with less training, but nutrition quality remains important. Focus on whole foods rather than simply reducing calories.
- **Body Composition:** Off-season is the best time to work on strength, lean body mass development, or other body composition goals with professional guidance and training.
- **Hydration Still Matters:** Fluid needs continue even when activity levels drop. Don't let hydration slip during colder months or rest periods.
- **Nutrient Density:** Prioritize colorful fruits and vegetables full of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber to support growth, immune health, and long-term athletic development.

FLUID INTAKE RECOMMENDATION

- Drink water consistently throughout the day—not just during activity.
- Monitor hydration by urine color: pale yellow is ideal.
- Use sports drinks or electrolyte powders during intense or prolonged activity, especially in heat or high humidity.

BODY COMPOSITION & WEIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

Weight and body composition will naturally fluctuate during the year. Growth spurts, muscle gain, or temporary weight changes are normal parts of athletic development, especially for student-athletes. Avoid comparison to peers—each athlete's journey is unique. Off-season is typically the safest time to address changes, if needed, under supervision.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN INDIVIDUALIZED APPROACH

Every athlete is different. Sport type, training volume, age, position, and goals all impact nutritional needs. Working with a registered dietitian ensures that athletes receive personalized guidance that supports both performance and overall well-being.

For questions about fueling, recovery, hydration, or body composition changes, connect with one of our registered dietitians. We're here to help you reach your full potential—on and off the field or court.

Want Personalized Nutrition Guidance?

Contact our dietitians to schedule a consultation!

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