Feeding
ACTIVE KIDS
The Junior Australian Football Player
A guide for parents, coaches and team managers
“Encourage your junior footballer to eat and drink well, feel great and perform to their best.”

This booklet offers guidance for meeting the nutritional needs of children aged five to 11 who play Australian Football. Parents and coaches frequently ask me, “What are the best foods and drinks for kids to have during a break at a sports carnival?” Just as often, in conversations between parents at sporting events, I hear quite different opinions being expressed about what is good and bad practice in watering and feeding our sports stars of tomorrow. Obviously, many people are seeking answers to some simple but important questions.

So it was very pleasing when the Canned Food Information Service asked me exactly the same sorts of questions because they wanted to know which of their products were appropriate for these active kids – before, during and after sport.

To answer these questions, we developed this booklet and the accompanying cookbook Fast Food for Active Families. I developed most of the recipes for the cookbook and tested them on our three ‘guinea pigs’ and their multitude of friends, who gather around the kitchen bench on the weekends after sport.

This booklet was first written when my own children were aged seven to 12. They are all now in their teenage years, but remain physically very active, so this subject is still dear to my heart. I know how hard it is to juggle the demands of daily living while trying to maximise the family health and energy levels, so that everyone performs at their best.

As a sports dietitian, I know that elite athletes are well catered for in terms of professional advice on diet and training. But the parents of younger children, particularly in their first few years of competition, often have to rely on the advice of well-meaning volunteer coaches. And sometimes that advice can be misleading or incomplete.

I am really pleased to have the opportunity to provide a service that fills this important gap and complements the work of other sports dietitians working with Australian athletes. The earlier healthy habits are established, the better.

I’d like to offer particular thanks to my colleagues, sports dietitians Karen Inge and Lorna Garden, for their support and professional review of the original publication, and Lisa Sutherland for her recent review and comments.

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It is important for the junior footballer to eat well every day – not just on game day or before a carnival. Active children need constant refuelling and cooling. Their nutritional needs are of great importance to their overall health, growth and development, as well as to their sporting performance.

The junior athlete will play better, for longer, and recover quicker from training and competition when well-nourished. The junior footballer, who is not getting enough total energy, may become tired, irritable and lethargic, and may even struggle to maintain interest and enjoyment in sport.

During the football season, there are several important things to remember when feeding your active child.

Ensure they have regular opportunities to eat foods rich in carbohydrates, such as bread and other cereal products, fruit, starchy vegetables and calcium-rich dairy foods. These Getting Ready foods listed on this page need to be eaten at frequent intervals each day.

Try to have at least one at every meal or snack. Carbohydrates provide energy for activity, keep blood sugar levels constant, aid concentration during the day and help to keep kids awake at school. Also, remember to encourage healthy dental hygiene habits to minimise the risk of tooth decay when consuming sweet carbohydrates.

 approaches

GETTING READY FOODS

Cereals
Breakfast cereals; rolled oats and other grains served hot or cold; bread and bread rolls; pita, Turkish and mountain breads; tortillas, tacos, lavash; crackers and crisp breads; rice cakes; corn thins; rice; pasta (including canned spaghetti); noodles; couscous

Dairy and soy foods
Plain and flavoured milks; yoghurt; milk desserts; calcium-enriched soy alternatives

Fruit
All fresh, canned or dried fruits; fruit bars; fruit fingers; fruit juices

Vegetables and legumes (pulses)
Potato; sweetcorn; sweet potato; peas; beetroot; pumpkin; baked beans; lentils; chickpeas; soybeans; bean mixes

Extras – sweet snacks
Low-fat cereal/muesli bars; muffins; biscuits; fruit buns; fruit loaf; fruit scones; pikelets; pancakes; waffles; cake; slice; low-fat brownie; jellied fruits; sports drinks
As well as eating and enjoying a wide variety of foods, it is important to make sure that junior athletes have enough protein in their diet. Encourage them to eat the Grow Foods listed on this page.

It is important that active children learn to eat according to their appetite – ensure they eat enough but not too much, while remembering they often have great variance in their appetite from day to day, due to factors such as activities, tiredness and growth.

It is important to encourage them (especially underweight children) to eat something at times when they feel too tired or busy to bother. But don’t panic if their appetite sometimes seems less than usual – that’s normal! This is why eating healthy snacks is so important.

Encourage ‘active’ recovery between training sessions and games by providing foods and drinks containing carbohydrates. Often, fluids are more acceptable to children at this time, with the best choices being sports drinks, fruit juice, and flavoured milk.

Foods containing a small amount of protein, as well as carbohydrates, are also great – try snack packs of canned fruit, fruit purees with yoghurt, baked beans or spaghetti with cheese on toast, cereal bars or fruit bars with a milk drink. For more suggestions, see Smart Snacks (page five), Energy Boosters (page eight), and Winter Warmers (page 10).

Remind children to keep up their fluid intake by drinking ‘mouthfuls often’ – during training and games, and immediately after each period of activity, as well as during the day at school or home. Water is the preferred drink, but during activity a flavoured sports drink containing carbohydrates and electrolytes may encourage greater intake.

The whole family may need to get organised for healthy eating – this can offer a great opportunity to change everyone’s food and fluid intake habits. Remember though, that the age and activity level of family members and friends will determine their required quantities.

‘Treat’ foods have a role to play in a healthy diet, but encourage children to recognise treats as an occasional, not everyday part of their diet. Discourage excess indulgences by explaining to kids that too much of anything can create problems and will certainly affect their ability to perform to their best. Preventing the development of a weight problem is easier than dealing with excess weight later.

If appropriate, use one of the junior footballers’ favourite AFL stars as a good example of health and fitness. You can tell them that their heroes eat what is recommended here.

GROW FOODS

Meat, fish and eggs
Meat – beef, veal, lamb, pork, turkey, chicken; fish – fresh, canned or frozen; seafood; eggs

Dairy & soy foods
Milk, cheese and yoghurt; calcium-enriched soy products – milk, yoghurt; tofu

Legumes, nuts and seeds
Baked beans; meat analogues (vegetarian foods); seed beans; nuts such as almonds, cashews and peanuts; peanut butter; seeds like pumpkin and sunflower
A NOTE ABOUT FATS

All children require a small amount of fat (3-4 teaspoons) in their daily food intake for normal growth and development. It is recommended that all Australians, including children, limit their intake of saturated fats (mainly animal fats). Children, however, need to include small quantities of the healthier unsaturated fats found in foods like fish, nuts such as almonds, seeds and avocados.

Children under the age of two need to be eating full-cream dairy foods to meet their nutritional and energy needs. However, children over two years of age are recommended to consume reduced-fat dairy products.

If your child is overweight, a healthy diet and activity plan will help.

Parents can help by reducing the child’s overall energy intake and encouraging more physical activity. Choose low-fat foods for meals and snacks, avoid the use of fatty takeaway and convenience foods, and replace high-sugar snacks and drinks with water and more nutritious choices like fruit.

Healthy eating is the same for overweight and normal-weight active children, although the amounts consumed might need to be different. Fatty, salty snacks should be minimised for everyone and replaced by some of the healthy snack suggestions listed on this page.

In football, there will always be a spot for bigger children, which is great for encouraging their participation in sport! But they will enjoy it more when they feel fitter and carry less body fat.

For those junior footballers wanting to gain weight or strength, the advice is simple – eat larger quantities of nutritious foods and healthy snacks like fruit, and enjoy more nourishing drinks to provide the extra energy required to convert to muscle.

SMART SNACKS

- Bread, crumpets or English muffins with jam, honey or vegemite
- A snack pack of fresh fruit or canned fruit
- Sandwich with low-fat cheese, honey or peanut butter
- Vegetable pieces with low-fat dip
- Breakfast cereal with low-fat milk
- Low-fat yoghurt
- Low-fat cereal/fruit bars
- Pita chips, pretzels or crackers
- Fruit bun or raisin toast with jam
- Corn and rice crackers or corn thins
- Scone, pikelet, pancake with syrup
- Low-fat smoothie with fruit (fresh or canned)
- Low-fat/quick cook noodles
- Low-fat milksakes
- Canned spaghetti or baked beans
- Water
- Homemade popcorn

Getting Ready
The night before a big sporting event requires extra effort to ensure plenty of carbohydrates are eaten and there has been sufficient fluid intake to guarantee a good state of hydration. Often this happens on a Friday night when busy families are pushed for time and spare energy.

If so, keep the food simple and use convenient canned and frozen foods and packaged foods like noodles, pasta and rice to supplement fresh products and produce healthy fitness foods – fast.

Thinking ahead and having foods pre-prepared will ease the pressure and help the family achieve a great performance all round. This is the time for carbohydrates, some protein foods and plenty of nourishing drinks. (Remind children that these are the same foods their AFL heroes eat the night before a big game.)

You’ll find many family favourites are ideal, including some of the recipes from the cookbook *Fast Food for Active Families*. If you don’t have this cookbook, you can download a copy from the SDA website www.sportsdietitians.com.

### Getting Set

**Planning the pre-game meals and being ready to enjoy the event**

### The Night Before a Big Game

**Healthy Family Fast Food**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipe</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logan’s Lasagne</td>
<td>Rich with beef, pork or chicken, canned crushed tomatoes, soup, frozen spinach and cottage and mozzarella cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Pasta</td>
<td>Your favourite pasta shape with bacon, vegetables and cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexi Balls</td>
<td>Beef, rice and seasoning from the cupboard turned into yummy meatballs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweet Lamb Curry</td>
<td>Luscious lamb and vegetables in a rich but mild curry sauce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mince in Minutes Tacos</td>
<td>Use our quick mince recipes to turn into tasty tacos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger Buster Burgers</td>
<td>Juicy quick steaks plus the favourite combo of beetroot, pineapple and cheese, plus salad in a roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Casserole</td>
<td>A classic but quick rich beef casserole enlivened with bacon, tomatoes and mushrooms which makes use of some handy cans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Wraps</td>
<td>A quick tortilla filled with roast chicken, canned beans, fresh salad and light sour cream or packaged tzatziki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuna Temptations</td>
<td>Your favourite pasta shape plus handy cans of tomato, tomato sauce and tuna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearty Minestrone</td>
<td>A meal in a bowl rich with vegetables, beans and rice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinwheels</td>
<td>Savoury spiral buns filled with tasty mince, herbs and cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pizza Power</td>
<td>Cleverly uses a prepared base topped with roast chicken, ham, pineapple and cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinach, Feta and Corn Pie</td>
<td>A delicious ‘loaf’ to serve with salsa or your choice of sauce</td>
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### Desserts and ‘extras’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple Crunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tropical Rice Pudding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apple and Raspberry Muffins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aussie Peach Dream</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit Salad Anzac Slice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pancakes or waffles*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pumpkin Damper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creamed rice with canned fruit*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canned fruit with custard, yoghurt or ice cream*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresh rolls, a salad or a fruit platter*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Drinks

<table>
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<th>Drink</th>
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<tr>
<td>Speedy Shake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit Spider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peach and Mango Smoothie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milk drinks*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit juices*</td>
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* Recipes not listed in the cookbook.
ON THE DAY
Select a combination from the following foods to make a nutritious breakfast:

- Wholegrain cereal with low-fat milk and/or yoghurt
- Toast
- Spaghetti or baked beans
- Eggs or low-fat cheese
- Juice or fruit

Breakfast should be eaten at least two hours before activity commences to keep your child feeling satisfied and well-fuelled. But if your child gets hungry again up to one hour before starting exercise, allow a small low-fat snack. If you have to travel long distances or need to make an early start before a game, pack some breakfast-on-the-run foods including flavoured milk drinks, cereal bars, bread rolls with spread, juice, fruit bars, canned or fresh fruit, and fruit buns. Or use a prepared liquid meal to allow your child to eat at a more suitable time.

The best foods to serve at breakfast are those your children are used to eating, and are quick and easy to prepare and eat – minimise fuss.

Low-fibre foods, like nourishing drinks, could be best for breakfast if your child gets an upset stomach due to nerves before a game. Otherwise, foods that are rich sources of carbohydrates, yet low in fat, are best eaten at the pre-game meal, which is usually breakfast.

Remember to encourage your children to drink fluids at this time. The best drinks for breakfast are low-fat milk, juice, and plenty of water. One to two cups should be enough.

BREAKFAST IDEAS

- Cereal with fat-reduced milk, fruit and yoghurt plus a glass of juice
- Toast with a scrape of spread, fat-reduced cheese and tomato with a glass of milk
- Spaghetti on toast with a fruit milkshake
- Scrambled egg with cheese and tomato, toast and a glass of juice
- Banana and peanut butter on toast, with a flavoured milk drink
- Baked beans with fat-reduced grated cheese on toast with fruit and a glass of milk
- Canned spaghetti on toast, yoghurt and a glass of fruit juice
- Canned fruit with yoghurt, toast and spread with a glass of milk
- Fruit or English muffins with a scrape of spread and honey or jam and a fruit smoothie
- Pancakes with honey and a glass of milk
- Crumpets with honey, a tub of yoghurt and a glass of flavoured milk or juice
Don’t rely on the canteen or nearest shop to supply foods and drinks over the day, as healthy choices are not always available.

Be prepared by packing your own supplies of food and drinks in a cooler bag or car fridge. Pack two drink bottles per child – one for water and the other containing a sports drink. Also take a top-up supply of cooled water, juice poppers and flavoured fluids, if it is going to be a long day.

During a carnival when kids will be playing more than one game each day, a carbohydrate-rich snack between each game will help boost energy levels and prevent hunger for junior footballers.

Each of these Energy Boosters listed here provides approximately 50g of carbohydrates. It’s always a good idea to encourage having some food with fluids, if time permits between games.

**ENERGY BOOSTERS**

- Flavoured milk or a liquid-meal tetrapak (e.g. Sustagen)
- Sports drink (600ml)
- Snack pack of canned fruit with a juice popper
- Sandwich with a juice popper
- Piece of fruit or packet of sultanas with sports drink (300ml)
- Bread roll with banana and water
- Low-fat cereal bar with a juice popper or flavoured milk
- Fruit bun with a juice popper
- Two large pikelets with jam or honey, plus a snack pack of canned fruit
- Fruit muffin (try the easy-fruit muffin packet mixes) with a juice popper or water
**FLUID INTAKE ON THE DAY**

In the half-hour prior to the game, aim to get your child to drink about one cup of water or some of a sports drink.

Cool fluids need to be available to all players at frequent intervals during each game. Most junior games are played over 40 to 60 minutes, broken into 10, 12 or 15-minute quarters. Aim for a fluid intake of at least half a cup at each break in play. This equates to a couple of ‘good mouthfuls’.

During a carnival, keeping up fluid intake between games is very important as some children may end up playing three or four games through the day. This is hard work and they need to top up with food and fluids to keep performing at their best.

Some players will obviously need more fluids than others, so keep checking how your child is feeling.

If they are starting to look or feel hot, increase the fluids a little more.

Early or later in the season, children need to be reminded to drink more frequently as the weather may be warm. As winter creeps in, their fluid losses will lessen, but it is even more important to remind them to drink, as they often won’t feel thirsty despite being dehydrated.

Immediately after the game or training, encourage kids to drink the rest of their bottle (at least 500ml). Sports drinks and water are best consumed during and after long sessions of activity, and are especially important during a carnival where children may play several games in succession.

Sports drinks have been proven to be useful in recovery as they assist fluid and electrolyte replacement. Also, it has been shown that children will drink more if the fluid is flavoured – vary the flavours to avoid taste fatigue.

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**AFTER THE GAME**

Recovery after each day’s game or training session is essential to maintain your child’s best performance – especially over consecutive days at a carnival.

Recovery snacks and fluids should be:

- Started within 30 minutes of finishing exercise
- High in carbohydrates with a little protein
- Quick and easy to prepare and eat
- Available at the venue if it takes a long time to get home
THE NIGHT AFTER A BIG DAY OF FOOTY

Coping with tired, hungry footballers at the end of a long day can be challenging for any parent. The temptation to line up at a fast-food outlet can be great, and pressure from the children can make it even harder to resist. Of course, takeaway foods can be enjoyed as an occasional treat, but generally try to limit these to special occasions rather than every weekend!

You may not be in the habit of having a meal ready at home, but with the help of some ideas from the cookbook, and remembering to use ‘convenience foods’ from the supermarket, it is possible. It also saves the family time and money, and certainly improves the nutritional value of the meal.

One solution is to have food already prepared in the fridge or freezer – only needing reheating while your child is taking a shower.

Have a selection of fresh, canned, packaged and frozen foods on hand to prepare home-cooked ‘fast food’. You will find the following quick and easy to prepare recipes in Fast Food for Active Families, as well as some suitable ones to prepare in advance for quick reheating when you get home.

Quickly prepared dishes for the family
- Mince in Minutes
- Tuna Temptation
- Hunger Buster Burgers
- Chicken Wraps
- Pineapple Chicken Stirfry
- Tropical Rice Delight

Ideal for reheating when everyone gets home
- Logan’s Lasagne
- Winter Casserole
- Sweet Lamb Curry
- Potato Power
- Hearty Minestrone
- Pinwheels
- Fruit Muffins
- Pineapple Sago

WINTER WARMERS

Junior footballers will be playing on cold, bleak winter mornings, and often look for something warm to eat after their game. Here are some winter-warming, nourishing snack ideas:

- Savoury jaffles with a milkshake
- A mug or bowl of soup with toast and a glass of milk
- Pancakes with fruit and yoghurt and a warmed flavoured milk
- Quick pasta snack with juice
- Crumpets with low-fat cheese or honey and juice
- Low-fat minute noodles with a hot milk drink
- Toasted sandwich with juice

Or try these Winter Warmers from Fast Food for Active Families:

- **Hearty Minestrone**
  Thick with colourful vegetables and nourishing beans, served with crusty bread and a glass of juice

- **Pinwheels**
  Delicious spiral buns filled with tasty mince and cheese – enjoy with tomato soup

- **Mince Muffins**
  Tasty, beefy mini-muffins that children love as an alternative to a meat pie – perfect with a hot milk drink

- **Mexi Balls**
  Delicious, meaty mouthfuls with just the right amount of spices to appeal to kids, who will love these with a banana smoothie

Go!
Running out of fuel is often not the main problem for junior footballers, but getting overheated is a real possibility for active kids, and can impair their performance.

- Children should always have their own water bottle on hand or in the team drink crate to sip from during the game and at breaks in play.
- Keep fluids cool (not a problem in winter!) and have a mix of water and flavoured drinks such as a sports drink to encourage greater intake during and after activity.
- Fluid loss will vary from game to game depending on a child’s involvement in the action and the conditions. Be prepared to compensate for extra fluid loss if your child is overheating.

Remind children not to wait until they are thirsty before they have a drink. By then, they will already be starting to dehydrate and possibly overheat.

Discourage your child from having carbonated drinks before, during and immediately after exercise as they can upset the stomach and reduce their desire to drink. (Bloating can be a problem and means they will get too full before they drink a sufficient volume.)

It is not suitable for active children to have high-caffeine drinks before, during or after sport. Discourage intake of tea, coffee, cola drinks and the new-age energy drinks that contain large amounts of caffeine. These are definitely not recommended for junior athletes.

Monitor drinks hygiene. Encourage your footballer to adopt healthy habits when drinking from a shared bottle. It is preferred that kids get into the habit of taking their own bottle, but if they forget, their lips should not touch any part of a shared bottle. Teach them how to squirt or use a chin-sipper bottle to get the water into their mouth.

Sports drinks are an excellent source of energy and fluid during and after activity. But encourage your child to use a straw or a drinks bottle they can squeeze to direct the fluid to the back of their mouth and avoid swishing around the mouth. It is also wise to encourage kids to rinse their mouth and mouthguard with water after taking flavoured fluids.
Know the warning signs for dehydration. If a child shows any of the following signs, it would be best to take some time out to rest and take in fluids.

- Dizziness and light-headedness
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea and headaches

After games, you will know if your child has not drunk enough fluids if you see any of these signs.

- Dark urine and infrequent urination
- Dry mouth and throat
- Feeling of extreme heat which remains after the cool-down period
RECOMMENDED READING

- *Eat Right for Kids* – Karen Inge
- *Gold Medal Nutrition* – Glenn Cardwell
- *Practical Sports Nutrition* – Louise Burke
- *Sports Medicine Australia Fluid Guidelines*

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

- Sports Dietitians Australia [www.sportsdietitians.com](http://www.sportsdietitians.com)
- Nutrition Australia [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)
- Dietitians Association of Australia [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)