

## **NUTRITIONAL ARTICLE FOR SS**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF BREAKFAST FOR THE ATHLETE**

*Our sports performance facility, the Epicenter, is purposefully designed to give each young athlete an athletic advantage in his or her sport by making them faster and more explosive. However, we often have athletes who put themselves at a disadvantage the very first time they step inside our doors. How, you ask? Simply by not eating breakfast or choosing one with little nutrition value, these athletes have missed the first step in becoming a better athlete and student.*

*Breakfast is the most important meal of the day so you should treat it as such and even make it your biggest meal too. Breakfast means “breaking the fast”. Literally, that is what a person does when eating breakfast as you break up the “fasting” state of your body overnight. Depending on what time your last meal of the evening was, this fast could be 10-12 hours long. If breakfast is skipped, your body and brain are made to go without food for up to 15-19 hours! This is way too long for your body to be at its optimum.*

*To make sure that the athlete knows the importance of a good nutritional breakfast and what that consists of, we sit down with our athletes or even go into the homes with mom and dad at the table to get a “game plan” for the entire family. It’s very important that mom knows what they are trying to accomplish for their son or daughter both on the athletic field and more importantly in the class room.*

*First and foremost we tell the student-athlete that if they are serious about improving their nutritional content at breakfast this will mean getting up earlier each and every morning so that they may be able to sit down enjoy breakfast and not be rushed for school, job or other activities.*

*Second we go a little more in depth as to why breakfast is so important. The athlete has to understand that their “metabolism” (the amount of calories that the body is burning during the entire day) is at the very highest in the morning and gets slower as the day progresses. So it stands to reason that one should eat more during this time of day as calories will be less likely stored as body fat when metabolism is burning at a higher rate. This is one of the major reasons why we (the Epicenter) always encourage our athletes to eat more at breakfast than at any other meal. We remind the athlete that it is very difficult to get fat following this principle.*

*Another factor influencing the metabolism is the amount of carbohydrates or “blood sugar” in the blood stream. When the blood sugar is high it increases the body’s ability to store body fat. Too many stored and unused fat cells create a sluggish over weight athlete who doesn’t live up to his or her athletic potential. During the morning hours blood sugar levels are low so incoming carbohydrates are less likely to be stored as body fat. In addition, your body needs energy from calories at this time of day to help it cope with the demands and activities of the upcoming day.*

*So what is a nutritional breakfast? This is our third discussion with the athlete and parent. Since most individuals taste varies, we give them a variety of choices—however at the top of the list is water each morning. The body is somewhat dehydrated at this time of day and dehydration tends to slow down the metabolism. Starting out in a dehydrated state is not a productive way to start out the day. Each meal should consist of some type of protein especially for an athlete and breakfast is no exception. Eggs are a great source of protein with very little fat content. One whole large egg has a little over 6 grams of protein and one large egg white has around 4 grams of protein with even less fat and cholesterol than one whole egg. Try eating 2-4 eggs in the morning and see what a difference it makes in how you feel the rest of the day!*

*One of the best breakfast foods and a great nutritional carbohydrate is natural whole grain oatmeal. A ½ cup or about a 40 gram serving contains 5 grams of protein and 27 grams of high energy carbohydrates. It also contains only 1 gram of sugar, 0mg’s of sodium and only 0.5 grams of saturated fat! Waffles or pancakes are great sources of carbohydrates when the syrup and butters are limited. If you must have butter try margarine instead which now most contain non-hydrogenated trans- fats which is much healthier for you. Whole grain cereals’ which are low in sugar with skim or 1% milk fat are also another good selection. Adding a wide variety of fruits to the cereals or on the side such as bananas, strawberries, or blueberries are a great way for the athlete to get antioxidants which helps in the recovery process of games or practices.*

*To wash your food down try fruit juices such as grape or orange juice which are full of vitamins, minerals and also full of antioxidants. Milk and water are also great choices. We stress the elimination of soft drinks at breakfast and all through the day.*

*So if you’re looking for high performance in the classroom and on the athletic fields, try and take the time to eat a nutritional breakfast. You won’t believe how you’ll feel and the difference it will make!*

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