

# PSRA Nutrition Recommendations

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You have risen to become a professional referee through your ability on the field, outstanding fitness and your love and commitment to the game of soccer. However, in order to excel at the professional level you need a little patience, a lot of experience and accepting the fact that you are, above all else, an athlete. With that in mind, for you to perform like an athlete, you need to start eating like one. Regardless of your professional referee goals, you're going to need to make a partial split with the culture. Your days of "energy drink and gel-referee-rest-repeat" are over- it's time to start fueling your body the right way.

Whether you realize it or not, as a professional referee you often put your body through immense strain during matches and training. Running 4-8 miles per game burns through a lot of calories and depletes your body of precious energy and fluids. Add to that equation maintaining concentration to make hundreds of decisions throughout the match and you are setting yourself up for failure if you don't fuel your body properly. Simply put soccer referees should be as well fueled as everyone else on a professional pitch. Every athlete's concentration and skills are greatly diminished when dehydration, hunger, and fatigue begin to set in. So, while fueling with fast food or whatever you can grab in the convenience store or airport on the way to the match has long been part of the culture of refereeing, as the games get faster and more demanding, you need to find your optimal fueling if you want to stay up to the challenge.

Professional athletes in the NFL, NBA and MLS are emphasizing to their teammates how much better they feel and perform since they started hydrating more and fueling their workouts better. To perform your best, it's important to join the movement toward abandoning the drive-through window for smarter sports nutrition options. What, and when, you eat and drink can greatly promote better performance on the field and better recovery after matches.

## Pre- game

### **Begin completely hydrated**

Through all the running you do as a referee, you generate a lot of heat that must be dissipated quickly to avoid overheating. Sweating during a game can lead to dramatic losses of fluid (up to 2-4 lbs during a typical soccer match and even more in hot or humid conditions.) In addition to water loss, when you sweat you are also losing electrolytes, such as sodium. Both water and sodium need to be replenished in order for you to perform your best. A loss of 2% of body weight during a match will have a negative impact on your performance and concentration during a game. (That's just 3.5 lbs if you weigh 175 pounds.) When you're dehydrated, your physical stamina and decision-making ability decreases and your concentration fades. Fortunately, dehydration can be avoided by developing a hydration plan before, during, and after matches.

If you go into matches and training sessions fully hydrated and fueled, you will be able to concentrate longer, and feel fresher at the end of the match. The most common cause of fatigue on a soccer pitch is dehydration. Keep a water bottle with you when you travel and in the locker room and be sure to make up for any previously incurred fluid deficits by consuming 16 oz of water or a sports drink 2 to 3 hours before kickoff. Continue to hydrate as needed prior to play, and have a sports bottle close at hand for rehydrating during halftime. If you're not sure whether you're fully hydrated, monitor your hydration status prior to the start of play by checking the color of your urine. If you are adequately hydrated, it should be a very light yellow. If it's the color of apple juice, you probably need to drink more fluids in the form of water or sports drink.

### **Begin completely fueled**

Glucose and fat are the primary energy sources for most athletes- players and referees alike. While a small amount of glucose circulates in your bloodstream, most of the glucose in your body is stored in your muscles and liver as glycogen. Glycogen and fat are your primary energy source on the field, but your reserves are limited. When you're properly fueled, you can keep up with the pace of play, but if your carbohydrate energy levels fade, you will begin to fatigue and could find yourself behind play. In addition, proper fueling can help prevent injury. Nearly 25% of all soccer injuries occur in the last 15–20 minutes of a game, when glycogen reserves are low and players (and referees) are fatigued. If you want to referee your best game, you cannot afford to show up for match with your carbohydrate fuel reserves empty. Moreover, you can delay the onset of muscle fatigue during play by refueling with good carbohydrate sources such as sports drink, an energy bar or a piece of fruit at halftime.

To top off your glycogen reserves, try to consume a small meal 2 to 4 hours before kickoff. Choose familiar high-carbohydrate foods and beverages and avoid slow-to-digest fatty and high-fiber foods prior to refereeing. As a snack, try a fruit smoothie, a meal-replacement beverage, or an energy bar. If you don't feel like eating solid food before a match, try liquid carbohydrate sources instead. A fruit smoothie or meal-replacement drink is a good alternative when you don't feel like eating something solid. Make sure to have readily digestible, high-carbohydrate snacks with you when you travel so when you get hungry on the plane or en route to the venue, you have something to eat.

## **Post- game**

### **Do what you need to do to recover**

Every athlete is different, so you need to determine what works best for you. Your body is ready to start the recovery process just as soon as you step foot off the field, but you need to provide the nutritional components for recovery, including carbohydrates to restore depleted glycogen stores, protein to repair and build muscle tissue, and fluids and electrolytes to rehydrate. Intense training sessions and back-to-back matches can seriously deplete the amount of glycogen stored in your muscles. Proper nutrition can speed recovery by reloading glycogen stores and rehydrating- enabling you to be strong and ready for your next training or match. Although your body is ready to begin recovering as soon as the final whistle blows, the recovery process does not truly begin until you get the nutrition your body requires.

## **Food suggestions**

**Recovery Options** (Some suggestions for food to pack in your bag or pick up after a match)

- Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
- Bagels or pita bread with a slice of cheese, turkey or hummus
- Crackers or pretzels
- Fresh fruits (apple, banana)
- Frozen fruit smoothies
- Pretzels dipped in peanut butter
- Trail mix with dried fruit
- String cheese and crackers with beef jerky
- Bean burrito with salsa
- Handful of nuts and dried fruit

**Ideas for high-carbohydrate pre-exercise meals** (foods to eat 2-4 hours before a match)

- Cold or hot cereal with fruit or fruit juice and low-fat or nonfat milk
- French toast or pancakes with maple or fruit syrup
- Toast with jam or honey and low-fat yogurt
- Breakfast burrito (scrambled eggs, salsa, and cheese in a flour tortilla) and fruit juice
- Bagel or English muffin, with jelly and/or peanut butter, banana, and fruit nectar
- Pasta or cheese ravioli with low-fat, tomato-based sauce, French bread or low-fat breadsticks, steamed vegetables, low-fat/nonfat milk, fruit
- Grilled chicken sandwich with frozen low-fat yogurt, baked potato with low-fat sour cream or salsa
- Turkey sub sandwich with tomato, lettuce, mustard, baked chips, fruit juice, low-fat frozen yogurt
- Thick-crust cheese pizza, low-fat gelato
- Baked or grilled lean beef, chicken, turkey, or fish, steamed rice, dinner roll, cooked green beans, low-fat frozen yogurt, fruit juice