

Get Back on the Pitch with Good Nutrition

If you search WebMD for a review of the [seven most common injuries](#), 6 of the 7 injuries listed are applicable to soccer – ankle sprain, groin pull, hamstring strain, shin splints, knee injury (ACL), and knee pain (patellofemoral pain). An October 2016 report in the journal, Pediatrics, reports that the [rate of youth soccer injuries has more than doubled over the past 25 years](#). An average 119,831 youth players are injured annually with 73% of the injuries occurring in youth players aged 12-17. Typical injuries included sprains/strains (34.6%), fractures (23.2%), and soft-tissue injury (21.9%). Concussions and other head injuries accounted for (7.3%) of the injuries.

Injuries are an unfortunate part of being physically active. How many of you think of nutrition when it comes to injuries?! You're an athlete (or the parent of one) and want to get back out on the pitch for your training session or match. Nutrition should be a key part of your injury game plan – good nutrition can support and speed up injury recovery.

Sports dietitians will look at a number of things to help facilitate your recovery with 4 nutritional goals in mind: 1) preserve muscle mass – keep the muscle mass you already have; 2) maintain energy balance – not gain or lose excessive weight due to injured status; 3) prevent body fat accumulation – you worked very hard on conditioning, let's not undo all of the hard work you have put in by having to focus on reconditioning; and 4) support muscle protein synthesis – to promote swift recovery.

Some nutritional tips to keep in mind when working with an injured athlete include:

- Small, frequent meals and snacks throughout the day
- All foods fit, but some foods are better than others – think quality vs quantity
- It is encouraged that athletes maintain a nutritious diet on a regular basis rather than try to boost up their eating habits during times of injury
- Looking at a well-balanced diet from a variety of foods
- Having a wide variety of foods (whole grains, fruits, vegetables) in the diet will bring various benefits – antioxidant properties, wound healing, tissue repair, cell growth/development, skeletal health, improves blood circulation and many more

Macronutrients	Benefits	Food Sources
Fat	Essential for decreasing inflammation, healing, and recovery	Nuts, seeds, avocado, oily fish (salmon/tuna), and oils (extra virgin olive oil, flaxseed, Omega-3)
Carbohydrates	Used for fuel so protein can be utilized for healing/repairing	Whole grains, pasta, potato, breads, fruits, vegetables
Protein	Used for healing and repairing; higher needs due to injury status (dependent on type/severity of injury)	Whey protein, cottage cheese, Greek Yogurt, lean meats, eggs, nuts, soy, seeds

Vitamins	Food Sources
Vitamin A	Spinach, carrots, tomato, sweet potato, cantaloupe, cheese, eggs, fish
Vitamin B12	Whole grains, pasta, potato, breads, fruits, vegetables
Vitamin C	Citrus, red and green peppers, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, peas
Vitamin D	Oily fish, dairy products, fortified foods, sun exposure (not a food but source)
Vitamin E	Sunflower seeds, kiwi, mango, nuts, spinach, vegetable oil

Minerals	Food Sources
Calcium	Dairy products, fortified foods/drinks, sardines, salmon, spinach, soy beans
Copper	Chocolate, soybean, sunflower seeds, cashews
Magnesium	Almonds, seeds, cashews, peanuts, banana
Zinc	Lean meats, cashews, fortified foods, baked beans

Dietary Supplements – may be considered beneficial to supplement the overall dietary intake but as evidenced above, consuming a wide variety of foods can help us meet our dietary needs. Consult with a sports dietitian if you are thinking of taking any dietary supplements. Some other things to consider for dietary supplements

- Safety/Efficacy – many supplements are tested/researched on adults; what are the unintended side effects on the growing child and/or adolescent

- Drug-testing – don't let a supplement derail your eligibility for high school/college

To consult with a sports dietitian, please visit the [Find a SCAN RD \(Sports, Cardiovascular and Wellness\)](#) for a listing of dietitians with the expertise and dedication to getting you back on the field as soon as possible.

[Angel Planells MS, RDN, CD](#) is a media spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics and owner of [ACP Nutrition](#). Angel is currently the Development Director for [Emerald City Football Club](#) (Seattle, Washington) and has coached youth soccer for 18 years.

