

Food Timing During Preseason

One of the biggest reasons athletes struggle during preseason isn't because they aren't working hard.

It's because they aren't fueling their training.

As coaches, we spend hours planning practices, but many athletes arrive under-fueled, go too long without eating, and then wonder why they're exhausted, struggle to recover, or can't perform consistently.

That's why I call nutrition the **fifth event**.

During preseason, athletes are building strength, increasing conditioning, learning new skills, and practicing longer hours. Their bodies need fuel throughout the day—not just a big meal after practice.

Think of food like gasoline in a car. You wouldn't wait until the tank is empty before filling it up. Athletes shouldn't wait until they're starving before they eat.

Here's a simple food timing schedule you can teach your athletes.

Breakfast

Start the day with protein, healthy carbohydrates, healthy fats, and fruit. Think eggs and oatmeal with berries, or Greek yogurt with fruit and granola. The goal is simply to start the day fueled.

Morning Snack

A small snack keeps energy steady before lunch. Fruit with cheese, yogurt, edamame, or another protein source works great.

Lunch

Build every lunch around four things:

- Protein
- Complex carbohydrates
- Vegetables
- Healthy fats

Simple meals like chicken and rice, a turkey sandwich with fruit, or leftovers from dinner work perfectly.

Pre-Practice Snack (30-60 Minutes Before Practice)

This is one of the most important meals of the day.

Choose quick carbohydrates with a little protein and just a small amount of healthy fat. Greek yogurt with fruit, a banana with peanut butter, or a rice cake with honey are all great options.

During Practice (if needed)

For longer practices, some athletes benefit from a quick snack like fruit, applesauce, or pretzels to keep energy levels up.

Post-Practice Recovery

Within about 30 minutes after practice, aim for protein plus carbohydrates. A smoothie, chocolate milk, Greek yogurt with fruit, or a turkey sandwich all help jump-start recovery.

Dinner

Dinner should once again include protein, vegetables, healthy fats, and quality carbohydrates. Remember, dinner isn't just recovering from today's practice—it's preparing for tomorrow's.

Before Bed

If an athlete is truly hungry before bed, that's okay. A protein-rich snack like Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, or a smoothie can support overnight muscle recovery.

The biggest takeaway I want coaches to remember is this:

Don't just teach athletes **what** to eat.

Teach them **when** to eat.

Food timing is a skill just like handstands, shaping, or landing mechanics. When athletes fuel consistently throughout the day, they have more energy, recover faster, and get much more out of every practice.

That's one of the easiest ways to improve performance without adding a single minute to practice.