

NUTRITION FOR NETBALL

At the elite level, netball is fast-paced, and skilled. Considerable demands are placed upon anaerobic energy systems, with aerobic fitness assisting recovery between bursts of play. Netball games consist of four 15 minute quarters. There is a 3 minute break between the first and second quarter and third and fourth quarter and a 5 minute break between halves.

Training

Training loads vary according to time of the season and the number of games played each week. During the competitive season, elite teams will normally have 1-3 training sessions per day. The sessions will be a mixture of team based session, individual sessions, cross training and resistance training. At the non-elite level, training loads vary.

Competition

Elite competition may involve a single game per week, a weekend 'away' tour or a week long tournament with potentially multiple games per day. Competition can involve a demanding travelling schedule which needs to be considered in the player's nutrition requirements.

Physical Characteristics

Netball players are generally above-average height. Some positions allow for shorter players, particularly where the ball is played close to the ground. Lower body fat levels can be an advantage in improving agility and speed, and with assisting movement off the ground.

Common Nutrition Issues

The Training Diet

A single game of netball does not provide a great threat to the fuel capabilities of trained athletes. However, a combination of regular training sessions and games throughout the week poses a challenge to the recovery of netball players. Players often have to juggle the demands of training and competing with full/part time jobs or study. It is essential for netball players to take an organised approach to nutrition. The following tips may help:

- At the beginning of each week, take a look at the schedule ahead and plan your meals around this. If you are living in a group house, use teamwork to share out the shopping and cooking tasks. Make the most of quiet days or rest days to get these tasks done. It makes sense to cook ahead in batches on these days, so that meals are ready in the freezer or fridge for the busy days. You will appreciate coming home after a tiring game or practice and being able to zap up a meal in minutes.

- A household of young players without cooking skills is a high-risk situation for nutritional problems. Consider the services of a sports dietitian to arrange supermarket tours and cooking lessons.
- Organise to have snacks available throughout the day. Things that can be carried around and eaten "on the go" include cereal bars, fruit, dried fruit and nut mixes, and muffins or slices. If refrigeration is available, the options can expand to include yoghurts, flavoured milks, tetra-packs of liquid meal supplements, pre-packed sandwiches, or a bowl of breakfast cereal and milk.
- Action-packed drinks such as fruit smoothies, liquid meal supplements (e.g. Sustagen) and flavoured milks provide a low-bulk carbohydrate, protein and energy boost.
- If games or practice sessions are scheduled for late at night, make sure your meal plan for the day is ready to cope with this. If you want to stick with the tradition of having your main meal at night, have it prepared before training or practice so that it can be ready within minutes of arriving home. Although it is important to refuel and recover after the workout, many people feel uncomfortable going to sleep on a very full stomach. An alternative is to restructure the day to make lunch the main meal, and then refuel after the session with a lighter meal or snack before bed.

Iron Status

Iron is an important nutrient for growth. Impact against other players or the floor may increase iron losses through increased red blood cell destruction. Some players may have problems with low iron status especially females with low iron intakes. Iron levels should be checked regularly when in heavy training. See iron fact sheet for more details. A sports dietitian will be able to provide specific dietary help.

Game Preparation - The Pre-Event Meal

The pre-game meal should fuel and hydrate players, but leave them feeling comfortable for the game. Ideally, the menu calls for high-carbohydrate choices eaten at least 2-3 hours before a game. Pasta with low-fat sauces, rolls or sandwiches, baked potatoes with low-fat fillings, creamed rice, and fruit salad with yoghurt, are all examples of suitable choices. Remember to include a source of fluid with the pre-game meal. Each player or team should experiment to find the routines that work best for their situation. Eating together as a team can be a great way to raise team morale and get focused for the game.

Fluids During Training and Games

High-intensity exercise in a controlled atmosphere stadium can lead to large sweat losses - especially in bigger players. Netball is a game of high-intensity running that also requires skill, concentration and decision-making. These factors can be impaired by dehydration and reduced blood glucose levels. Sports drinks can be a good fluid choice for netball games and

training sessions. They promote better hydration and provide a fuel source to maintain blood glucose levels.

Netball offers plenty of opportunities for players to hydrate during games. Time outs, quarter and half-time breaks, and time spent on the bench can all be used as opportunities to consume fluid. During training, coaches need to schedule frequent drink breaks and actively encourage hydration. Players should keep their own drink bottle courtside, so that they can keep track of how much they are drinking. In professional teams, the job of refilling bottles is often left to the team manager or other support staff members.

Post-Game Recovery Tactic

Effective recovery begins with the intake of fluid, carbohydrate, protein and other important nutrients. Left to chance, recovery eating may take a back seat to the post-game meetings, stretching and injury treatment, drug testing, media interviews, or the trip back home or to the team hotel. Many teams organise post-game recovery snacks that can be consumed simultaneously with these activities - sports drinks, liquid meal supplements, flavoured milk, fruit, sandwiches and cereal bars are some of the many quick options. Depending on the time of the game and the athlete's appetite, this post-game snack may be supplemented by a later meal.

Tournament Nutrition and Road Trips

As soon as the match schedule is known, plan a meal routine that schedules appropriate pre-event meals and recovery strategies. When several games are played in succession over as many days, pro-active recovery techniques will be important in maintaining performance right through the end of the schedule. If you are playing away from home, plan where you will be eating meals, and organise the menus in advance. Similarly, take control of meals eaten on planes, buses and other travel options. Always carry some high-carbohydrate snacks such as cereal bars, fruit and yoghurt for emergencies. In hotels, empty the mini bars to make room for more nutritious snacks and drinks.

This fact sheet is based on National team athletes and is therefore specific to these athletes. Written by AIS Sports Nutrition, last updated October 2013. © Australian Sports Commission.