

NUTRITION FOR SOFTBALL

Softball is a game of skill, timing and power. It characteristically involves extended periods of play, often in challenging environmental conditions. A softball team consists of nine players. Theoretically, all team members are required to bat and field, while only specialist pitchers are required to pitch. Games last for a set number of innings, therefore playing times vary.

Training

Elite softball players have demanding training schedules consisting of weights, fitness sessions, sprint training and skills training. Skills training sessions typically last for 2-3 hours.

Competition

Softball is primarily a summer sport, with the domestic season (club ball season) running from September-March. Recreational teams tend to play one game per weekend. At the international level, softball players compete nearly all year round.

During international competitions, Grand Prix events, Nationals and State based competitions; teams usually play two games per day. Games are typically played in warm-hot conditions.

Common Nutrition Issues

Training Nutrition

Elite softball players have busy lifestyles as training is usually combined with work or study commitments. Planning ahead is essential to ensure nutritional requirements are met throughout the day.

Softball players need to base their intake on high-nutrient foods (cereals, fruit, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, lean meat and poultry, fish, nuts, seeds, legumes etc) and consume low-nutrient foods (soft drink, confectionery, cakes, biscuit, fried foods etc) in smaller quantities.

The intensity of training sessions can range from low to very high. It is therefore important to match food intake to the activity level of each day. Food intake needs to be well timed to enhance recovery between sessions when players have more than one strenuous training session per day. Extra snacks such as yoghurt, fruit, dried fruit and cereal bars are required on heavier training days.

Body Fat Levels

Successful softball players tend to be strong and powerful. While very low body fat levels are not necessary for softball players, high body fat levels can restrict speed and agility. Softball can involve long hours of low intensity activity with only short bursts of high intensity work. Unless regular conditioning sessions are included training, some players may have problems maintaining a desirable body composition.

Softball players wanting to lose body fat need to assess their training load. Long-term changes may need to be made to food intake. Dietary strategies may involve:

- Reducing the total quantity of food consumed.
- Replacing low-nutrient foods (chips, chocolate, confectionery, soft drink) with high-nutrient foods (fruit, nuts, low-fat dairy foods etc.)
- Assessing snacking behaviour - Snacks may not be necessary on low activity days.

Game Day Nutrition

Softball players need to begin each game fuelled and hydrated. Ideally, a meal that is based on carbohydrate and includes some protein, vitamins and minerals and a small amount of fat should be consumed before a softball game. Good choices include: cereal, yoghurt, sandwiches, pasta and fruit. Ideally players should eat 2-3 hours before the game begins. Including fluid choices such as water, cordial or sports drink with this meal are good ways of ensuring fluid needs are also met.

Time spent in the dugout area while waiting to bat provides opportunity for players to rehydrate and replace sweat losses throughout the game. Sports drinks are recommended when softball players are particularly active. In most cases it will be unnecessary to eat during a game. However, in some cases, snacks such as fruit and cereal bars may be necessary to manage hunger during long games.

On days where more than one game is played, recovery is a major concern. At the end of a game, players need to replace fluid and carbohydrate. If the next meal is more than an hour away, players should have a carbohydrate-based snack (e.g. sandwiches, fruit, yoghurt, milk drinks or cereal bars) in conjunction with fluids (e.g. sports drinks, cordial, juice or water) as soon as possible after finishing the game.

Travelling Abroad

Elite softball involves regular international travel. This can pose a number of challenges to meeting nutritional needs. Unusual foods, different standards of food hygiene, limited food availability and interference with usual routines can see athletes either gaining weight or failing to meet their nutritional requirements. The tips found in the travel section of our website may be of help.

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.