



healthyfood@sport

Find the Balance for Growth and Athletic Performance – Fact Sheet

Whether it's training for a soccer game or playing a game of netball, children's athletic performance, growth and development depend on eating the right foods. Unfortunately, it is easy to forget just how important nutrition is to good health and athletic performance. Many children, especially in the years before puberty, have poor eating habits (skipping breakfast, eating the same foods day after day). As a result, their diets are missing nutrients and their growth and athletic performance may be impaired.

Children have special nutritional needs. It is important to meet their nutritional needs as they enter puberty, when they experience rapid growth as they undergo hormonal changes. A healthy diet can be achieved by planning to include a variety of foods on your plate. Especially for children, a dinner plate can serve as a visual guide for choosing foods and planning nutritious meals. As a parent, you can promote the following basic principles for an optimal performance diet:

- **Variety** - no single food contains all the nutrients your child needs for optimal health, growth and performance. Buy a variety of healthy foods so that your child has a better chance of eating from all the food groups;
- **Moderation and substitution** - use moderation with those foods that are less nutritious and try substituting with foods that are more nutrient dense. For example, substitute fruit-flavoured frozen yoghurt for ice cream, and low fat cheese and crackers for chocolate bars. Offer fruit fresh as an alternative to unhealthy snacks;
- **Balance** - kilojoule intake and energy expenditure should be balanced to maintain a healthy weight. While encouraging healthy eating, continue supporting your child to be physically active. Provide nutritious snacks and fluids before and after training and competition; and
- **Model** - model healthy eating. If you set a good example for your child by exercising and eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, your child is more likely to "eat to compete" and grow into a healthy adult.

Balance Your Plate

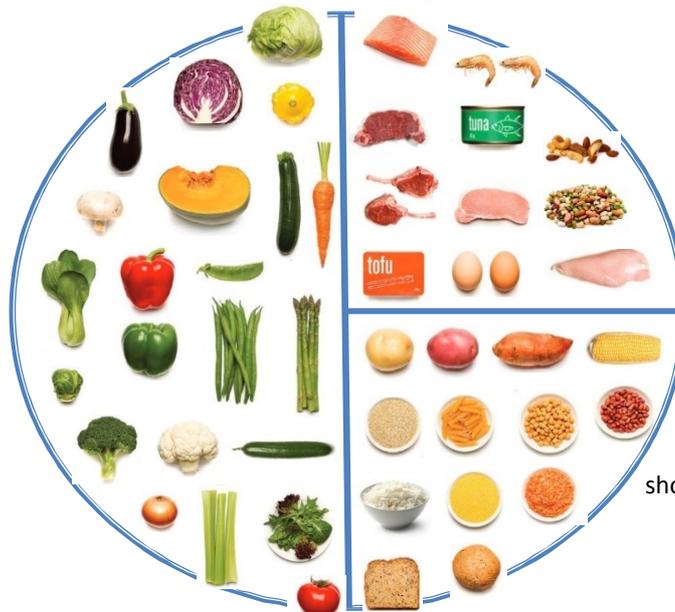
Choose water as your favourite drink.



Fill up half of your plate with veggies.



Limit healthy fats to 1 teaspoon per meal



A quarter of your plate should contain lean protein

A quarter of your plate should contain carbohydrates

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