

Wrestling Nutrition

By: Angela Gillaspie © 2005 All Rights Reserved

Disclaimer: The following information is meant to be used as a basis for diet, not as the AYWA enforced rules.

Wrestling is one of the few sports that allow kids of all sizes to compete. It requires strength, concentration, skill, agility, and endurance. The best way to ensure a powerful and consistent performance is having a healthy eating plan for the season. The following information will help the youth wrestler have the best diet for a championship season.

WEIGHT CLASS DETERMINATION

AYWA youth wrestlers aren't required to stay in a specific weight class during the season. If the wrestler is a few pounds away from a lower weight class, he may want to try and lose those pounds because being at the top of a weight class (e.g., weigh 100.0 in the 100-pound class) gives the wrestler a small advantage.

AYWA coaches do not approve of or recommend any drastic weight loss because the wrestlers' health is more important than winning

Your body is composed of fat tissue and lean tissue. While fat is fat, lean tissue includes muscle, bone, and water. Throughout the season it's normal for the wrestler to lose extra body fat to gain muscle. The American College of Sports Medicine and The American Academy of Pediatrics both have set 5% as the minimum percentage of body fat for males to keep healthy. Having less than 5% body fat can lead to serious health problems. There is no scientific evidence that proves that a wrestler performs better at 5% body fat, rather than say, 8-10% body fat.

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COUNTING CALORIES?

As each person has a different metabolism, weight, and energy level, he or she will have a different calorie need. Generally, no one should go below 1600

calories a day because below this number of calories doesn't provide the body with enough nutrients and will cause a loss of lean tissue.

If the wrestler wants to lose fat tissue, then he should start a weight loss regime well before wrestling season begins. Never lose more than two (2) pounds per week - this ensures that the weight lost isn't just water weight or lean tissue, plus it maintains the metabolic rate. If the wrestler chooses to lose weight before the wrestling season starts, then he won't be deprived of the much-needed vitamins that are very important for his growing body.

The formula to estimate your calorie needs is:

1. Multiply your weight by 10. For 120 pounds, $120 \times 10 = 1200$.
2. Multiply that number by 1.7. For 120 pounds, $1200 \times 1.7 = 2040.0$

This number, 2040 for a 120-pound wrestler, is the estimated number of calories you will need per day to maintain your weight. To lose weight, you will then need to lower that estimated number by 250 to 500 calories per day to safely lose 1-2 pounds per week.

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DANGEROUS WEIGHT LOSS PRACTICES

Over the years, wrestlers have used several dangerously unhealthy ways to lose weight rapidly. These ways impair health and have actually lead to death.

These dangerous weight loss practices include:

- Yo-Yo Dieting. Binging and fasting enables your body to store more fat, making it more difficult to lose weight.
- Starvation/Fasting. Starving causes your body to lose muscle tissue first, not fat tissue. Each time you fast your body stores fat more efficiently, thus increasing the mass placement of fat tissue. This makes it harder and harder to lose weight.
- Diet Pills/Laxatives. These are forbidden because they contain chemicals that increase your heart rate and blood pressure. Laxatives often lead to dehydration.
- Dehydration. This is the result of not drinking enough fluids. This is very dangerous and leads to lowered strength, decreased endurance, slower blood flow, increased stress on the heart, and inability to regulate body temperature. Spitting, water pills (which can damage the kidneys), and exercising in a hot weight room (this is the most dangerous of all

because there's a high chance of heat stroke and heart failure) all cause dehydration. A sign of dehydration is dark yellow urine.

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BASIC NUTRITIONAL BUILDING BLOCKS

Wrestlers need a proper diet to perform their best and to maintain or lose weight. The three major building blocks of nutrition are: carbohydrates, protein and fat.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are used for energy. For the best performance, eat a lot of carbohydrates 1-2 hours after practice to increase energy stores and prepare for the next workout or practice. Carbohydrates should be approximately 60% of the calories you eat per day. For example, if your calories are 2,000 per day, 60% is 1,200 calories from carbohydrates per day.

1,200 calories equals 300 grams of carbohydrates - there are four (4) carbohydrates per gram, so $1,200 / 4 = 300$ grams.

High Carbohydrate Foods:

- Chocolate milk
- Beans
- Carrot, corn, sweet potato, potato
- Yogurt
- Beans, peas
- Apples, bananas, cantaloupes, oranges, pears, pineapples, grapes, watermelon
- Prunes, dates, raisins
- Raspberries, strawberries
- Bagels, biscuits, breadsticks, bread, buns, English muffins, cornbread
- Cereal and Granola
- Fig Newton bars
- Graham crackers and saltine crackers
- Pancakes and waffles
- Pizza
- Popcorn

Protein

Protein also provides your body with energy. Muscle tissue is mostly made of protein so not eating enough protein will hurt performance. Typically, your body needs 0.5 to 0.9 grams of protein per pound, or about 10 to 20% of your calories per day. Like carbohydrates, there are four (4) calories of protein per gram. For example, if your caloric intake is 2,000 calories per day, then 15% (to split the difference between 10-20%) is 300 calories, divide this by four (4) and you will need 75 grams of protein per day.

High Protein Foods:

- Almonds, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, sesame seeds
- Eggs
- Tofu
- Fish
- Chicken
- Cottage Cheese
- Beans
- Shellfish
- Yogurt

Low Protein Foods:

- Vegetables
- Grains
- Breads

Fat

Young wrestlers definitely need fat in their diet. Fat is feared nowadays but without it food would taste bland, your body couldn't absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K, and you wouldn't get essential fatty acids. Another great thing about fat is that it helps you feel full longer. Your body uses fat as an energy source - just what a young wrestler needs during a high-pressure match. 20-30% of your daily calories should come from fat, but no more than 30%.

For 2,000 calories per day, you need 400-600 fat calories. There are 9 calories of fat per gram, so 400-600 calories are rounded out to be 44-67 grams of fat per day.

Watching your portion size and not forgetting that there are calories in sodas can help you stay within your designated calories per day.

Glycemic Index

Another important part of the wrestler's diet is maintaining sugar levels and knowing the glycemic index of foods. The faster and higher a food makes your blood sugar rise - the higher its glycemic index. Keeping your blood sugar from fluctuating will give you energy and improve your ability to focus. Good blood sugar = good energy for performance. High glycemic index foods are useful during and after practices and matches while lower glycemic index food may be helpful before practices and matches.

Low Glycemic Index Foods:

- Skim Milk
- Plain Yogurt
- Soy beverage
- Apples, plums, oranges
- Sweet potatoes
- Oat bran bread
- Oatmeal
- Rice (not instant)
- Pasta
- Beans
- Peas

Medium Glycemic Index Foods:

- Banana
- Pineapple
- Raisins
- Grapes
- New potatoes
- Popcorn
- Brown rice
- Couscous
- Shredded wheat cereal
- Whole wheat bread

High Glycemic Index Foods:

- Watermelon
- Dried dates
- Instant mashed potatoes

- Baked white potato
- Instant rice
- Cereals like Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies, and Cheerios
- Bagels
- Saltine crackers
- Jellybeans
- French fries
- Ice cream
- Granulated White Sugar

NOTE: If you want to experiment with high to low glycemic index foods, then do it at practices first to see how your body reacts.

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STAYING HYDRATED

The most important nutrient of all is water. If you become dehydrated, your metabolic rate slows down, and then exercise, practice, or your wrestling match feels difficult. It has been estimated that a 1-2% loss of body weight due to fluid loss causes about a 15-20% decrease in performance.

Signs of dehydration are rapid heart rate, dark urine, tiredness, dizziness, ringing ears, and even hunger.

Facts about dehydration:

- Feeling thirsty is a late sign of dehydration and your performance could lack by up to 10% before you even get thirsty! Stave off thirst by drinking enough fluids.
- It's best to drink about 20 ounces of fluids two (2) hours before practice or competition and 8 ounces every 15-20 minutes during practice or competition.
- Continue to drink fluids after practice to re-hydrate. A good rule of thumb is to drink two (2) to five (5) or so cups of fluid.
- Check your urine to monitor your hydration. Light yellow is good, dark yellow means you're dehydrated.
- Avoid beverages with caffeine, carbonation, and lots of sugar like soft drinks. These block the body from absorbing fluids.
- Cold fluids are best. They cool you down and your body absorbs cold drinks faster.

- Avoid large amounts of fruit juices because they'll cause diarrhea. 100% fruit juices are best for you - in moderation.
- Water is best to drink for re-hydration. Sports drinks are okay too, and they have the added benefit of carbohydrates to give your practice or wrestling match a boost, but the high sugar content has been known to cause cramps.

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EATING FOR COMPETITION

Just as your truck needs gasoline, oil, and water to make it go, your body needs to be well fed and watered so that you can perform your best. The following suggestions outline what to eat before, during, and after a wrestling tournament.

- The Night Before the Competition: A couple of hours before bedtime drink 18-20 ounces of water or sports drink, and eat both protein and carbohydrate snacks with low glycemic indexes. For example, spread peanut butter on some graham crackers, make a small turkey sandwich, or mix up an envelope of Carnation Instant Breakfast with skim milk.
- Match Day: 4-5 hours before the match, eat a high carbohydrate, moderate protein, and moderate fat snack, like orange juice and a bagel with jam, or cereal and skim milk with a banana, or pancakes with syrup with 100% fruit juice and skim milk.
- 1-2 Hours Before the Competition: Eat a high carbohydrate, low protein and low fat food like nonfat yogurt, banana, or 100% fruit juice.
- From Weigh-in to Match: drink 8-12 ounces of a sports drink.
- Between Matches: eat high glycemic index foods like dry cereal, bagels, raisins, grapes, and graham crackers.
- After the Match: The first 15 minutes after exercise are the most important to begin replacing carbohydrates and rebuilding sugar stores. Beware of eating empty calories and high fat from foods and liquids like donuts, candy, and soda because they don't contain the protein, carbohydrates, and other vitamins needed to help your body recover.

According to the NCAA, follow the three "R's" of muscle recovery:

- Re-hydrate your muscles with water
- Replenish your muscles with liquid carbohydrates like 100% fruit juice or high-carb sports drinks

- Repair your muscles by continuing to drink high-carb beverages and eat high-carb protein and fat foods for the next two hours to "feed" your muscle tissue.

Nutrition Tips:

- Good nutrition is just as important before the event as after the event to ensure good muscle recovery and to lessen tiredness and injury during the season.
- Stay hydrated by drinking enough water throughout the day remembering that thirst is not the first sign of dehydration.
- Always read labels and drink 100% real fruit juices instead of fruit juice mixes.
- Drink water instead of soda, because carbonation and caffeine promote dehydration.
- Health bars, power bars, etc. are much better for you to eat than candy bars.
- If you're in a hurry and don't have time to eat before practice or a competition, there are many liquid meal supplements available like Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, and Boost. Never skip a meal!
- The first 15 minutes after a competition or practice, drink water, pineapple juice or even a sports drink AND eat either oranges or bananas to help your muscles recuperate faster and to energize you and fight off fatigue.