

Tennis: Tips for the Nutritional Advantage

Tennis has evolved into a “power sport.” Players need to sustain the quick anaerobic movements required by the sport for matches that can last several hours. The competitive tennis season is also held during the warmer months where a high heat index and hot court surfaces are common environments. These conditions make tennis players targets for dehydration and heat illness. The tennis training diet should be focused on high-energy foods and adequate hydration, timed appropriately before and after multiple competitions. The following guidelines help develop successful nutrition and hydration practices for players.

Pre-Match Eating and Hydration Guidelines

Tennis players need to pay special attention to their pre-match meals and beverage choices, as these foods and fluids may need to last for hours during tournament and multiple match play.

Players should select pre-match meals and snacks that are:

- Familiar to them and known to settle hunger
- High in carbohydrate to supply energy for muscle reserves, moderate in protein and low in fat
- Quickly digested (not too high in fiber or fat)

Examples of pre-match meals and snacks rich in carbohydrates are pasta, bread, fresh fruit, granola bars, energy bars and sports drinks.

Meal Guidelines

LUNCH (3-4 hours prior to competition)

Turkey or grilled chicken sandwich with mustard
Saltine crackers
Apple
1 cup of skim milk
8 oz serving of Gatorade

PRE-GAME SNACK (1-2 hours prior to competition)

Fruit yogurt or banana
1 cup of water
1 Gatorade energy bar
20 oz Gatorade thirst quencher

Hydration tips before players hit the court:

- Limit/avoid caffeinated beverages (iced teas, coffee, colas) especially right before and after match play. These may cause additional fluid loss as urine.
- The night before, fill and chill squeeze bottles or sports jugs and bring to each practice or match. Each player should have a minimum of 2 liters available courtside.
- Consume enough fluids throughout the day so urine is a light or pale yellow color before starting a match.
- Drink 17 to 20 oz of fluid within 2 hours pre-match.

Fluid Needs During Play

Thirst is not a good indicator of hydration level. Adequate fluid consumption is a player’s best bet for beating dehydration and heat illness. To keep tennis players performing at their best, encourage fluid consumption every 15 minutes and especially at changeovers. Players should consume 5-10 oz. of fluid (sports drinks containing 14g/8oz carbohydrate and electrolytes are ideal) every 15-20 minutes for optimal hydration and performance.

Favor sports drinks to enhance rehydration. Sports drinks contain carbohydrate and electrolytes, like sodium. Consuming carbohydrate during play has been shown to help players maintain more power and accuracy with serving and groundstrokes in long-match play. Gatorade contains 14 g carbohydrate per 8 oz, which is quickly absorbed and used by working muscles. Sodium replacement is also important since a significant amount of sodium can be lost through sweat during long tennis matches.

Post-Match Nutrition

Players should eat foods and drink fluids that replenish muscle energy stores and electrolytes lost in competition.

Share these guidelines with your athletes:

- Eat carbohydrates as soon as possible, preferably within 30 minutes of a match. Begin by drinking a sports drink as you walk off the court.
- Replace 150 percent of body fluids lost or at least 20 oz per pound of weight loss within 2 hours of a match.
- Eat a high-carbohydrate meal that also contains a lean protein source within 2 hours after play to maximize muscle glycogen recovery (rebuild energy stores) and to support protein synthesis in muscle.
- During tournament play, be sure to include carbohydrates, protein, fluid and sodium in the evening meal to quicken recovery from play. Consider lightly salting foods and consuming foods and beverages that are natural sodium sources.

Example of Post Match meal

2-3 cups of pasta with marinara sauce (light in meat and fat content)

2-3 slices of garlic bread (light on margarine)

Salad with vinaigrette or low fat dressing

2-3 cups of Gatorade or low fat milk or energy drink

OR

2-3 cups of Chinese-steamed rice with vegetables and chicken stir-fry

2-3 cups of Gatorade or low fat milk or energy drink

- **Avoid high-protein and high-fat foods as these will contribute to dehydration**

As tennis players play under intense heat and prolonged match situations, it is important to keep them well conditioned, fed and hydrated. When these guidelines are followed, players will serve up a powerful match to any opponent.