

## Soccer: Energy for Tournaments

By MICHELE MACEDONIO, M.S., R.D. L.D.

Nutrition consultant and freelance writer, Nutrition Strategies (Loveland, OH)

Tournaments present unique opportunities and challenges for the individual soccer player and the team as a whole. One of the most important challenges is supplying adequate fluid and food to fuel the athlete participating in multiple matches throughout the tournament period. What makes the challenge especially complex is the two-fold nature of the dilemma, that of supply and demand.

### Multiple matches mean increased demand for energy

A single soccer match may deplete most of a player's fluid and nutrition reserves. During a tournament, matches may be as close as an hour apart, leaving little time to rebuild fuel stores. Consequently, fatigue sets in sooner; speed, skills, accuracy and concentration are compromised; and the risk of dehydration increases. In warm environments, the degree of dehydration and its associated dangers are even higher.

### Planning ahead will ensure an adequate supply of "sport-friendly" foods

Immediately after a match, the hunger sensation may be blunted so it is crucial that foods or beverages consumed at this time be high in carbohydrate (CHO), the preferred fuel for the physical demands of soccer. In order to store those carbohydrates as muscle glycogen, the body also needs sufficient fluid.

Tournament concession stands offer limited selections, often with many high-fat foods. Fast food restaurants may be an option but careful selection is necessary to ensure adequate amounts of carbohydrates. When possible, the best bet is to bring a supply of "sport-friendly" foods and beverages to the tournament. Even when traveling far from home, there are some simple tips for ensuring a supply of portable foods and fluids that meet the high-energy demands of soccer tournaments.

### Beverages and Carbohydrate-rich foods that power soccer players and travel well

#### Beverages

■ **Choose a sports drink.** Gatorade supplies 14g CHO per 8 oz, a good choice for quickly replenishing fluids and electrolytes lost in sweat and supplying carbohydrates during exercise. [Follow these guidelines from the National Athletic Trainers' Association:](#)

- ✓ 17 to 20 oz fluid 2 to 3 hours before the match
- ✓ 7 to 10 oz fluid 10 to 20 minutes before the match

- ✓ 28 to 40 oz fluid per hour during the match (7 to 10 oz fluid every 10 to 15 minutes of play)
- ✓ 20 oz fluid per pound of weight lost during the match, within 2 hours of finishing the match. Players should weigh themselves before and after several games to estimate weight loss during matches.
- **Water alone doesn't cut it.** It blunts thirst and doesn't supply needed nutrients to fuel the body.
- **Skip the soda.** The carbonation makes it harder to gulp down enough fluid plus carbonation can bloat the stomach causing indigestion.
- **Cut the caffeine.** Caffeine is a diuretic increasing fluid loss, impairing rehydration.

#### Carbohydrate-rich Foods

To quickly restore lost muscle glycogen, soccer players should consume 2g CHO per kg (.9g CHO/lb) body weight within the first 2 hours after a match. Pre-game meals should be eaten 2 to 3 hours before a match to allow food to empty from the stomach. Frequently, the interval between games may be too close to digest a standard high-carbohydrate meal. In that case, athletes are wise to select easy to digest, carbohydrate-rich foods that will provide quick energy for the next match.

Try combining several of the items below:

- ✓ Energy or fruit bars
- ✓ Fresh fruit
- ✓ Fruited yogurt
- ✓ Bagels, muffins, cereal mixes with dried fruit and nuts

If an athlete feels uncomfortable eating solid food between matches, consider these convenient liquid options:

- ✓ Carbohydrate-rich drink
- ✓ Liquid meal

If a soccer team can meet the challenge of supplying enough fluid and nutrition throughout the tournament, the opportunities for success are great!