

Wrestling Nutrition Guidelines 2023

Wrestling is one of the most physically demanding sports around, so proper nutrition is paramount for good performance. As coaches, we strongly advocate that wrestlers eat a balanced diet of nutritious foods. The quality of one's diet has a direct effect on performance in competition, the practice room, and the classroom.

Sleep

Getting enough sleep is equally important as good nutrition. There is an undeniable correlation between adequate sleep and good performance on the mat and in the wrestling room. Wrestlers should get no less than eight hours of sleep per night.

Fluid Intake

Drinking enough fluids is crucial during the season. The intensity of practices and matches makes it very easy to become dehydrated, and prolonged or persistent dehydration is extremely unhealthy. Water should be the first choice when it comes to replenishing fluids; there is no substitute for it. Wrestlers should drink at least half their body weight in fluid ounces of water each day, even on days when practices or competitions are not held. Sports drinks such as Gatorade are fine to consume immediately after a practice or match, but should be avoided at all other times. Fruit juices are also good following an intense match or practice. Milk is fine anytime except within an hour or so before a match.

Proper Diet

A proper wrestling diet can be established by eating the right amounts of each of the three macronutrients: carbohydrates, protein, and fats. Wrestlers should ideally adhere to a diet that gets 50 percent of its calories from carbohydrates, 25-30 percent from protein, and 20-25 percent from fat. Carbohydrates are the most important component of a wrestler's diet, since they provide most of the energy needed for physical activity. Most sources of carbohydrates also have little to no fat in them, which is another reason to eat generous amounts of them. Not all carbohydrates are the same; refined sugars and flours are more easily stored as fat, while whole grains and other fibrous carbohydrates tend to be stored as potential energy in the muscles. It's thus important to eat carbohydrates that fall in the latter group. Examples of good carbohydrate sources include whole-grain breads, cereals, and pastas, brown rice, oatmeal, potatoes, and beans (legumes). Protein primarily serves as a building block for muscle tissue, and increases in muscle mass translates to increases in muscle strength and endurance. Furthermore, the more muscle mass you have, the easier it is to burn fat. Protein sources vary widely in terms of fat content and their ability to be absorbed by the muscles.

Good protein sources include:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Chicken
- Turkey
- Lean beef
- Low-fat milk products (cottage cheese, yogurt, cheese, etc.)

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Fats promote absorption of other nutrients and increase the rate of muscle growth to an extent. However, they have the greatest tendency to increase body fat levels of the three macronutrients and also slow endurance and recovery time when consumed in excess. Wrestlers generally do not need to consume any fat beyond what is naturally contained in the other macronutrient sources they eat. The exact number of calories that a high school wrestler should consume each day is difficult to determine, particularly because metabolisms vary greatly from athlete to athlete and because the body is primed for growth during the teenage years. Rather than keep track of calorie intake, it's a better idea to simply eat until they are just satisfied, but not overly full. Keep in mind that it takes about 20 minutes for the brain to register a "full" feeling. If they are eating enough, they should not feel excessively hungry between meals. They should also monitor their weight regularly to ensure that they are not overeating either, although it is possible to gain weight by eating too little.

Weight Management

Since competition is determined by weight class, cutting weight is one of the most common concerns among parents. "Cutting weight" is a term for when athletes rapidly lose weight in an unnatural way in order to make a certain weight class, and is highly discouraged not only by us as coaches but is prohibited by state and national wrestling rules. Cutting weight drains wrestlers' energy, making it harder for them to focus, sleep and compete at their best and can have short and long term negative health impacts. Rather, we educate our athletes on safe and healthy weight management plans to help them reach a healthy and realistic goal weight. According to WIAA rules and regulations before competing in a season each wrestler is required to pass a hydration and weight assessment to determine a weight descent plan that does not allow for drastic weight cuts, but rather maps out safe weekly weight descent plans. If you want to learn more about the WIAA Weight Management Program it can be accessed on the WIAA website at www.wiaa.com.

Proper Weight Loss

If wrestlers decide to lose weight, they often starve themselves to do it. This is not only extremely unhealthy, but also counterproductive. When your body goes into starvation, it responds by burning fewer calories, which slows down the rate of weight loss. Furthermore, most of the weight that is lost while starving is in the form of muscle and water. The end result is a decrease in strength and energy that translates to diminished performance in wrestling, and more importantly, in school. The healthy way to lose weight is to decrease your daily calorie intake slightly. To do this, wrestlers should eat the same number of meals each day, but eat slightly smaller portions. We require that they log their weight several times per week, so they should know what kind of progress they're making. A loss of about 1-2 pounds per week is reasonable, but they are, by rule, allowed 1.5% of body fat per week until they are at 7% for males and 11% for females. The number of pounds will be different for every wrestler.

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Supplements

There is a huge market for fitness supplements nowadays, and many athletes take them in hopes of enhancing their performance in sports. However, many of these supplements do little or nothing to aid performance, and some have unhealthy side effects. As such, we do not allow wrestlers to take any supplements beyond vitamins and protein shakes. There is also currently a large market for protein and energy bars. Many of these products are nothing more than expensive candy bars and have little nutritional value, although some good ones exist. As a general rule, if the bar has even half as many grams of fat as it does protein or gets most of its carbohydrates from sugar, it's not a good choice.

When To Eat What

Eating at the right time can be nearly as important as eating the right foods. Having some small, healthy snacks spaced evenly throughout the day is encouraged, since this delivers a steady supply of nutrients to the body, makes it easier to burn fat, and makes it harder to overeat at the three standard meals. Having something to eat an hour or two before a match, particularly something rich in carbohydrates, can aid performance on the mat. Most wrestlers already eat immediately following weigh-ins, and this is a good practice. However, overeating before a match will often leave them feeling sick while competing. Eating another carbohydrate-rich food immediately after a match is a good idea as well, as it guards against muscle-energy depletion.

Holidays

The wrestling season spans several holidays. Family gatherings are common at these times and there's usually a lot of food around that doesn't belong in a wrestler's diet. We realize that during these special occasions, it's very tempting to splurge. If they've been sticking to an otherwise healthy diet, it's fine if they want to give themselves a reward, but they must be careful not to overdo it. It's much better to fill up on the good foods that are available.

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COMPETITION DAY COOLER STUFFERS

- Sandwiches
- Water
- Fruit cups
- Fresh fruit
- Protein bars
- Cereal
- Granola bars
- Juice (unsweetened)
- Yogurt
- Raw vegetables
- Sport drinks
- Cereal bars
- Pretzels
- Crackers
- Bagels
- Beef jerky
- Rice cakes
- Cottage cheese

DAILY FOOD SUGGESTIONS

GOOD:

- White potatoes
- 2% milk
- White rice
- Ground beef
- Pasta
- Canned vegetables
- Instant oatmeal
- Chicken legs
- Beef

BETTER:

- Red potatoes
- 1% milk
- Wild rice
- Ground round
- Wheat pasta
- Frozen vegetables
- Quick-cooking oats
- Chicken thighs
- Poultry

BEST:

- Sweet potatoes
- Skim milk
- Brown rice
- Ground chuck
- Whole-grain pasta
- Fresh vegetables
- Rolled oats
- Chicken breasts
- Fish

FOODS TO AVOID:

- Soda
- Candy
- Chips
- Cookies
- Fast Food