

In order to achieve success the school soccer team is training hard but they also need to consider some of the issues around their food intake. Some issues could be the need for quickly prepared meals and snacks, lack of nutritional knowledge and preparation skills, confusing media messages and printed information on labels.

All players in the team may lack nutritional knowledge which is a big issue as the members would not understand which foods will help performance and which foods will hinder it. To improve performance the players will need to change their diets with full understanding of what they are consuming. Because all members have a busy schedule, they want to have fast, easy and cost efficient meals. The packaged food at the supermarkets nowadays provides this option; however the players do not understand all the information and claims on the packaging so do not know whether they are selecting the right choices.

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The players could do some research on the internet and in books to find some suitable meals and snacks. However if they do not have an understanding of the nutrients needed to improve their performance they will be influenced by the recipes and snacks promoted by sports people and companies. These companies have their own interests to promote, not always the best interests of the athletes. The nutritional knowledge and cooking skills could be provided by the Home Economics teacher, a dietician or a sports nutritionist at a meeting that the whole team attends. The players could learn about key nutrients and foods that are needed to enhance their performance and also learn some simple skills and basic quick recipes that are easy to modify. There are some useful magazines that provide a range of lower cost recipes using seasonal produce; the best way to check these is to see who the authors are and if they have any sporting/nutritional qualifications. A very helpful magazine available in NZ is...

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For example, a simple beef stir fry on rice is always popular. A cheaper lean cut of beef such as schnitzel is used but could be adapted with other meats such as chicken or fish or it could be extended to feed more with the addition of legumes such as chickpeas. The rice could be substituted for pasta and any seasonal vegetables could be used – to make it lower in cost. The rice or pasta contains complex carbohydrates which will release energy slowly so the players will have sufficient energy for the game. It is important to have plenty of complex carbohydrates leading up to games to enable the body to build up glycogen stores in the liver and muscles. The rice also contains B vitamins which assist with the release of energy. The lean beef is a good source of protein and iron – the protein helps repair any muscle tissue as well as helping with the growth of adolescent muscles. Without a good supply of protein, the player would be unable to restore muscle strength making it difficult for them to play their best. The iron helps carry oxygen to the muscles and brain which is vital for the players to move quickly and also vital to ensure they are thinking straight...

The vegetables contain vitamin C that helps the body to absorb iron and also vitamin A...

If you add a smoothie to the meal, simple carbohydrates...

Pre competition: A main meal should be consumed at least four hours before a game or practice....

During competition:...

Post competition:...

At least 10 glasses of water...

The skills learnt in class could be used at home to help other family members or the classes could be held at night where several members could come along and learn. This way the family are learning to support each other by selecting, preparing and cooking meals to suit all the family's needs but still keeping within a budget. Learning how to read the information on packaging when out shopping at the supermarket would be useful as manufacturers highlight and use colourful images to promote their products and write the nutritional information in small letters. The dietician could help the families to look at suitable websites and how to check whether the information is recommended and credible e.g. in the 'about us' section there is information about the people and their qualifications.

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The dietician could provide the team mates and their families with small pocket/wallet size cards that explain for a product to be considered suitable it must be under 10g fat, under 10g sugar, over 6g fibre and under 120mg salt per 100g. Also knowing that ingredients are listed in order of their quantities mean the athletes would have some control over their choices and also understanding what some words mean e.g. that 'sodium' is a salt and 'maltodextrin and honey' are sugars. Knowing what the difference is between 'total and saturated fat' would help in the choice of packaged snack foods such as muesli bars. Better still the families and players could learn to make muesli bars with ingredients that they like but also using less saturated fat and simple sugars. Fruit juice and a little vegetable oil along with spices like cinnamon and nutmeg will add just as much flavour and crunch as plain sugar and butter. Some lipids are needed in the athletes' diet to...

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The team members may be influenced by advertisements on TV, where well known athletes promote certain foods or sports drinks. This leads to everyone thinking that the product being promoted is nutritious, which is not always the case. However if the families have learnt how to read the packaging labels they may already have the skills to work out what is in the product and why water is the better choice.

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The team members could also discuss sports drinks with the Home Economics teacher or dietician when they meet for classes to learn what the purpose of these drinks is as opposed to energy drinks. They could then choose when to drink water, which costs nothing and when to choose a sports drink which contains electrolytes with the right amount of sodium and sugar to help rehydrate them during and after a game. Dr Smith from Otago University stated that "These are only needed by athletes playing high level or elite sport." Unfortunately many players "are faced with marketing that sends them mixed messages about what's required for sport and certainly the food and nutrition guidelines in New Zealand at that level of activity say they only need water to rehydrate."

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