POWERED BY: Kinetic Fuel PERFORMANCE BASED NUTRITION

MA Hockey

Girls 5 - 9 years old

Young girls just love to play hockey. So what should parents feed even the youngest athletes to fuel their growing bodies and to establish healthy habits?

1. **Hydration is vitally important even for young players who don't sweat like adolescents and teenagers.**

Children are not yet tuned into their bodies. They may not be aware of how they feel or may not be able to verbalize the symptoms of dehydration beyond feeling thirsty or maybe dizzy.

Water is the best choice for children. If they prefer it flavored, try adding sliced strawberries and kiwi to water in an ice-cube tray. Freeze and then add the fruit containing ice cubes to the water bottle for a delicious and appealing drink. Or squeeze an orange into water. Not only is the vitamin C from the fruit beneficial for fighting illness, but the antioxidants from the strawberries also are healthy.

Avoid sugary drinks, sports drinks, juice and soda. Another way to encourage young athletes to drink plenty of water is to allow them to pick out their water bottle. Some like straw-style tops while others prefer a squeeze bottle. Establishing a habit of bringing a water bottle with them will serve them well for a lifetime.

Encourage and remind young players to drink often. Not just on a warm days or on game days. Every day is a good opportunity to hydrate.

2. **Feed a young player real food that you recognize in as close to its natural state as possible as often as possible and reinforce to them that real food is good fuel for their bodies to skate and shoot… and grow into strong, smart hockey players.**

Their last big meal should be about 2-3 hours before they play, but they will need a snack 30-45 minutes beforehand. There is a misconception that children *need* snack food for snacks, i.e. goldfish, crackers and cookies. They may *like* them, but they certainly don't *need* them. Nor do they need munchkins at the rink or bagels in the locker room. They don't need an ice cream cone for every goal or pizza after the game every week.

I'm all for bringing food to share with teammates, and in doing so, you can set the standard for a healthy team culture. Offer players colorful fruit skewers, seedless watermelon balls in a cup with a toothpick or bananas. (Note: After putting hands in gloves, you may want to also offer hand wipes or continue to think along the lines of the suggestions above where players aren't touching the food with their hands.)

I'm also on board with incentivizing kids to try their best. Do that with your words by telling them how proud you are. Or use a non-food reward, which is another good life habit to establish.

Young athletes can benefit from proper hydration and nutrition. If a player comes off the field and complains about a stomachache or that his head hurts, examine fueling and hydration. If they are whiny or seem out of sorts, perhaps dehydration or low blood sugar may be the cause.

Plan ahead and stock a cooler with plenty of cold water and healthy snacks for before or after the game. It's never too early to be #EatingtoCompete