



Post Game / Pre Game Nutrition and Fluid
Dr Clint Steele, DSC CSCS

**Questions answered by Dr. Clint Steele, DC, CSCS
provided for Hockeycoach.com**

Question

Hello,
I have a question about pre-game meals and nutrition.

What types of foods are best to eat before a game?

When is it best to eat before a game?

What about in-game fluids? I currently drink only water, but I find myself fatigued half way through. I was thinking about drinking Gatorade. Any thoughts on that?

Thanks much!

Answer

Let me take these questions one at a time.

What types of foods are best to eat before a game?

You are going to find with all the questions you have asked me, there are many answers depending on who you ask, so please keep in mind that I am answering based on my knowledge and my experience.

Some general rules that you need to follow include keeping away from fried foods as well as high fat foods. Also never try a new food prior to a game. Always test out any new foods prior to a practice. I always tell my players that every player is going to respond differently to different foods and different times prior to a game. You need to find out what is right for you and that is usually through trial and error.

What I have found to be the best-case scenario for most players is as follows:

2-3 hours prior to the game: a portion of low fat carbs (low glycemic index carbs) with a portion of low fat protein. A portion size is the size of your palm or fist. Fluids at this time can be water or a Gatorade PowerAde. Some players at this time also like to consume a pre-packaged powdered drink mixed with water. I like these as you know right away how much protein and carbs you are

getting plus they are usually easier to digest and they usually have a low glycemic index. Again you will need to go through some trial and error here.

30 minutes prior to the game some of my players like to eat an "energy" bar. Some swear by it, for others it makes them sick. Many of my players like to start drinking a PowerAde or Gatorade at this time. Again trial and error here but your best bet is to start with your energy drinks here in my opinion.

In regards to in-game fluids: I highly recommend a Gatorade or PowerAde during the game. I am not usually very big on commercial products in this area as in many cases it is all about the dollar but in this case these companies have done some very extensive research and in my opinion they have done a good job. I have found that players generally have more energy towards the end of the game then when they consume a commercial drink as compared to when they just drink water. Even with my own training I find a huge difference when I drink a commercial drink or for that matter even fruit juice rather than water.

One key issue that you did not ask about is post game meals/drinks. The reason I want to address this is because this can be just as important if not more important than pre game or in game drinks. Recovery after the game especially when playing 3-4 games over a weekend in a tournament or even when playing back-to-back games in consecutive days is crucial. Most experts will agree that following a game you have a window of opportunity of about 30 minutes to restore muscle glycogen. The reason this is so crucial is because glycogen, in large part, is what gives your fast twitch muscle fibers energy. At the end of the game this muscle glycogen is depleted and needs to be restored ASAP especially if you are playing again within a 24-hour period. As with the previous questions you are bound to get different answers here depending on whom you ask as to the best way to restore glycogen. A former writer for the magazine and NHL strength coach wrote an article on this where he recommended marshmallow squares; another one of my colleagues recommends chocolate or strawberry flavored milk. The basic idea here is to make sure that you get some glucose into your system. Some of the research shows that if you combine this glucose with protein it will be absorbed quicker therefore the reason for strawberry milk (glucose plus protein). Another reason for this milk is because fluids are absorbed into the system easier than solid food and it is usually more convenient as well. There are also some good pre packaged powders on the market now that are made specifically for post-game nutrition.

I am sorry I cannot be more direct in my answers however it is not as cut and dry as many people think. Athletes respond differently and therefore it is important to find out what works best for you and stick with it.

Dr. Steele specializes in training hockey players off ice and in the weight room. His programs have helped hockey players from all over the world from peewees through the pros improve their game and reach their ultimate potential. In addition he is founder and president of Better Hockey Inc., which runs betterhockey.com, and TOPDOG Off-ice strength training and conditioning programs for players in person or over the internet/phone. Dr. Steele can be reached at info@betterhockey.com.

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