



Fueling the Body, Fueling the Brain

We often say food is fuel, but it's more than that. Nutrition directly affects how young athletes think, feel, focus, sleep, and recover. Balanced meals and hydration aren't just for physical strength, they help with stress, confidence, and emotional regulation.

Gut-Brain Connection & Mental Wellness

The gut and brain are in constant communication through nerves, hormones, and the gut microbiome. This connection means that what we eat directly affects how we think and feel. Poor nutrition—such as diets high in sugar and processed foods or skipping meals—can disrupt this balance, often leading to mood swings, brain fog, increased anxiety, and poor sleep. When kids eat better, they not only feel better physically, but also experience improved emotional regulation and mental clarity.

What Fuels Performance & Recovery

- **Carbs** = steady energy (choose oats, fruit, whole grains)
- **Protein** = muscle and brain recovery (especially post-practice or injury)
- **Healthy fats** = mental focus and emotional balance (nuts, avocado, fish)
- **Hydration** = even a 2% drop can impact concentration and decision-making.

Good nutrition before an injury often leads to better emotional resilience after one.

Real-Life Tools for Coaches & Adults

- **Keep snacks on hand:** fruit, string cheese, trail mix, nut butter sandwiches
- **Model healthy messaging:**
 - “Don't eat that, you'll slow down” versus “How can we fuel your body today?”
 - “Let's keep you strong and steady” versus “Cut weight before weigh-in.”
- **Reinforce balance:** All bodies are performance bodies. Normalize rest and recovery.

Quick Wins to Share with Athletes

- Prep snacks for games and tournaments
- Use a checklist: Did I eat? Hydrate? Rest?
- Learn hunger and fullness cues
- Make sleep part of the performance plan