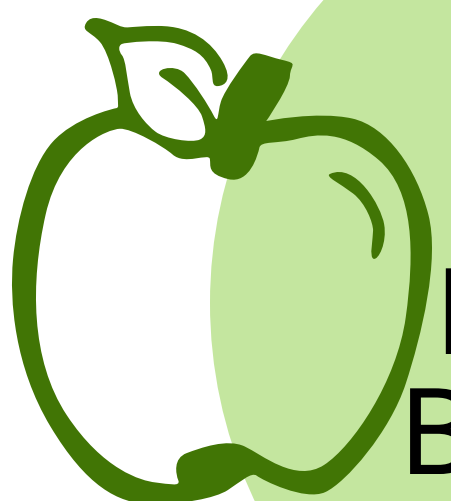


# Athletes and Nutrition: What Effective Coaches Need to Know

**Special  
Olympics  
Michigan**



MODEL  
HEALTHY  
BEHAVIOR

PRACTICE  
POSITIVE  
MESSAGING AND  
COMMUNICATION



OFFER HEALTHY  
SNACKS AT  
COMPETITIONS  
AND PRACTICES

CHOOSE  
HEALTHY  
OPTIONS ON  
THE ROAD



Athletes often learn eating behaviors from watching us. By demonstrating healthy choices at competitions and practices, Special Olympics Michigan coaches can role model healthy behaviors around nutrition and hydration.

- Choose water (avoid soda, sports drinks, energy drinks, sugary coffee beverages).
- Avoid having fast food bags and cups visible at practice, events and competitions.
- Prioritize whole fruits and vegetables when you are at practice, events and competitions.
- Practice and encourage healthy portion sizes.



- Use positive messaging to encourage healthier choices.
- Try to avoid language that is coercive, shaming or conditional. Most people are more motivated by positive messages than negative ones.

## Set Expectations

Events can feel like special occasions, and sometimes athletes might want to celebrate by having foods that are less healthy. Help set expectations by talking to athletes about how events are for promoting health, and that athletes can celebrate by playing with others and having fun.



## Use Positive Reinforcement

### Examples of things to say:

"Look how Susie chose apple slices as a side instead of French fries with her sandwich. She must know that fruits and vegetables are full of good nutrition that can help us perform better as athletes."

"What are some of the healthy things we can order at today's lunch stop?"

### Examples of things not to say:

"You shouldn't eat so many cookies. They're going to make you gain weight."

"I wish you hadn't ordered a super-sized soda with lunch. I'm disappointed that you don't care more about eating healthy."

"Whoever skips dessert gets to ride at the front of the bus today."

## Recruit Athlete Leaders

You don't have to promote healthy choices alone. Athletes can be excellent health ambassadors and champions for healthy eating!

Athlete leaders can:

- Coordinate healthy snacks
- Pick healthy stops on the road
- Brainstorm menu items to order
- Remind team to take water breaks



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Snacking is a great way to help athletes meet their nutrition needs and maintain energy during practice and sports events.

## **Make healthy snacks available throughout the day.**

People can often make unhealthy choices when they are hungry and no healthy options are available. Try to make healthy food choices available throughout the day to keep athletes from getting hungry and seeking out less healthy foods.

### **Plan ahead.**

Sometimes, it's hard to find healthy choices on the go. Plan ahead for what snacks to have at events or on the bus, and where you'll stop for food when traveling. That way you know healthy choices will be available.

### **Have water breaks.**

Sometimes when we feel hungry, we're really just thirsty. Advise athletes to bring their own refillable water bottles. If possible, use water filling stations instead of plastic water bottles to cut down on waste.

## **Choose beverages and snacks that meet USDA's Smart Snacks in School Nutrition Standards.**

When choosing snacks, it's good to offer a few items from different food groups.

### **Examples of healthy snacks that almost always meet the guidelines include:**

- Hummus and veggie sticks ●●●
- Fresh fruit and nuts ●●●
- Apple slices and reduced-fat cheese (like part-skim mozzarella sticks) ●●●
- Trail mix with dried fruit and nuts (no added sugars, chocolate or candy) ●●●
- Whole grain crackers and reduced-fat cheddar slices ●●●
- Veggie sticks and guacamole ●●●
- Hard-boiled eggs ●●●
- Smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and fresh or frozen fruit ●●●
- Lean turkey slices and whole wheat crackers ●●●
- Veggie sticks and nut butter (like peanut or almond) ●●●



For snack and beverage suggestions:

<https://www.amazon.com/b?ie=UTF8&node=17867964011>

To see if a snack meets healthy snack standards:

<https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/calculator/>



● gluten-free    ● dairy-free    ● vegetarian



# Athletes and Nutrition: What Effective Coaches Need to Know

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Snacks can be delicious and healthy. It is important for athletes to know what foods will improve their performance and keep them fueled properly, and also for coaches to promote healthy eating behaviors by supplying nutritious snacks.

**You can help prioritize athlete nutrition and athletic performance by offering foods and beverages that align with our Healthy Food and Beverage Guidelines.**

**WHOLE FRUITS  
& VEGETABLES**

**SNACKS  
THAT MEET  
HEALTHY  
SNACK  
STANDARDS**

**WATER  
OR FRUIT  
INFUSED  
WATER**

Snacking is a great way to help athletes meet their nutrition needs and maintain energy during practice and sports events. The Healthy Snack Standards are:

- Whole grain as the first ingredient
- Fruit as the first ingredient
- A vegetable as the first ingredient
- Dairy product, or a protein food as first ingredient
- Be a combination food that contains at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of fruit and/or vegetable

The snack should also meet the following nutrient standards per serving:

- Calories: 200 calories or less
- Sugar: 35% of product weight from total sugars or less
- Sodium: 200 mg of sodium or less
- Fat: 35% of calories from total fat or less
- Saturated fat: Less than 10% of calories from saturated fat
- Trans fat: Zero grams of trans fat



# Athletes and Nutrition: What Effective Coaches Need to Know

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Snack on  
this

Not this!

\$0.52 per serving



fruit and nut trail mix

\$0.47 per serving



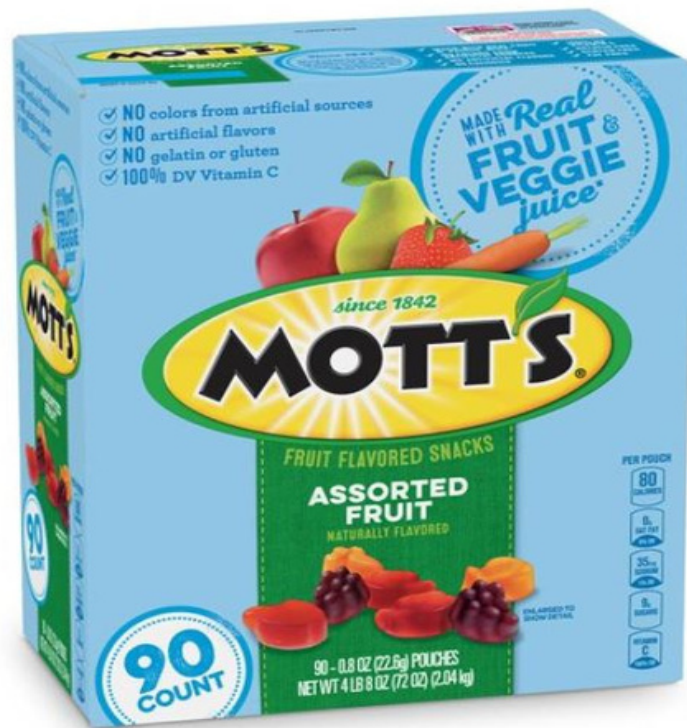
sweet treats

\$0.25 per serving



fresh fruit and vegetables

\$0.25 per serving



fruit snacks

\$0.50 per serving



light string cheese or plain yogurt

\$0.60 per serving



sweetened yogurt and processed  
cheese snacks

\$0.22 per serving



popcorn and rice cakes

\$0.39 per serving



cheese puffs

\$0.12 per serving



water

\$0.49 per serving



soda and sports drinks



# Athletes and Nutrition: What Effective Coaches Need to Know

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Olympics  
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Many athletes and teams travel to sports events in their regions and statewide. It is important to maintain good nutrition and hydration while traveling to an event, before, during and after the competition. Coaches should plan with the team to determine what foods and beverages to pack and where to eat while traveling and competing together.

### Tips for ordering at restaurants:

- Choose baked, grilled or broiled foods instead of fried.
- Choose fresh fruit or a side salad instead of fries or a cookie as a side.
- Ask for toppings and dressings on the side
- Always encourage water or unflavored low fat milk instead of sugary beverages.

## Guidance for Ordering at Fast Food Restaurants

### Sandwiches

- Aim to keep your meal to 500 calories or less
- Choose whole grain bread
- Add extra veggies on your sandwiches
- Choose mustard/vinegar instead of mayo
- Choose a half portion of meat
- Make it a salad instead with dressing on the side
- Choose healthy sides like applesauce instead of cookies
- Order a 6-inch sub instead of a foot long sub

### Subway



6-inch Veggie  
Delite Sandwich with  
applesauce



Oven  
Roasted Chicken  
Salad with  
dressing on  
the side

### Burgers

- Aim to keep your meal to 500 calories or less
- Avoid supersized and value-sized items
- Order burgers with a single patty without cheese
- Choose a wrap instead of a burger
- Skip the bacon
- Choose healthy sides like apples instead of fries
- Ask for condiments on the side
- Choose a 4 or 6-piece chicken nugget instead of an 8-piece

### McDonald's



Plain Hamburger  
with Apple Slices



4 or 6-piece  
Chicken Nugget  
with Apple Slices

### Mexican Food

- Aim to keep your meal to 500 calories or less
- Choose veggies and beans instead of meat
- Choose two individual tacos instead of a platter
- Watch out for sodium – meats, sides (beans, rice and fried potatoes) can contain a lot of added sodium
- Avoid fried and breaded items
- Ask for condiments on the side

### Taco Bell



Power Menu Bowl  
with dressing on  
the side



Bean Burrito



Water or low-fat plain milk instead of  
sugary beverages

Adapted by EMU REACH with permission  
from Special Olympics Washington,  
Healthy Food & Beverage Toolkit, 2020.



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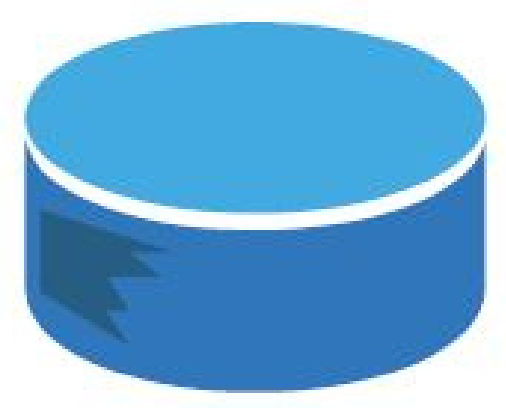
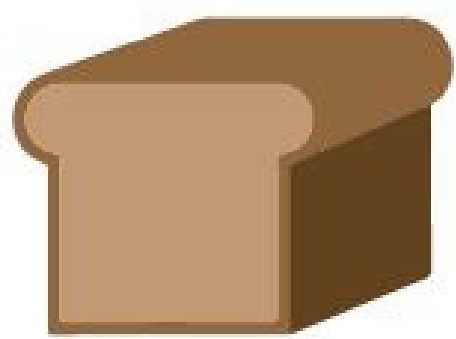

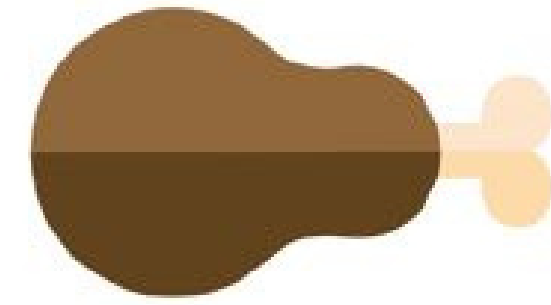






## Promote Healthy Portion Sizes

**When eating out, purchase smaller portion size options.**  
Offer half-sandwiches and half-sized entrees. Offer smaller versions of desserts, or other foods high in salt, saturated fat or added sugars.

**Use smaller plates, bowls, beverage containers and other serve ware.**  
Have smaller-sized cups for beverages other than water.

**Role model healthy portion sizes.**  
Encourage athletes, staff, and others to model healthy portions. Drink only water when athletes are present. All other beverages (coffee, tea, etc) should be in opaque unmarked containers.

 baseball	=	 1 serving of fruit	 1 serving of rice or pasta	 1 serving of vegetables
 hockey puck	=	 1 serving of bread	 1 serving of beans	 1 serving of meat
 golf ball	=	 1 serving of cheese	 1 serving of nuts	 1 serving of nut butter

Source: [Special Olympics Fit 5 Guide](#)

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## Pre-Event Checklist:

☐ Emphasize hydration with athletes.

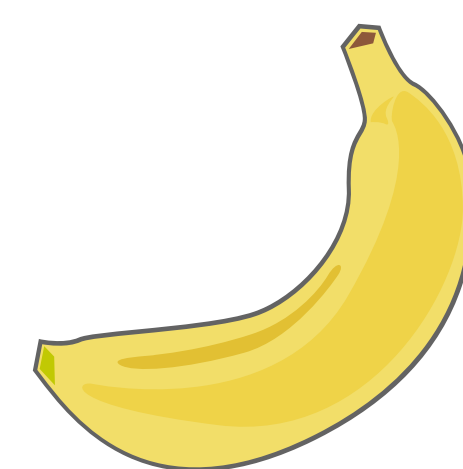


☐ Confirm any food allergies or special diet needs with the athlete, parent(s), or guardian(s).

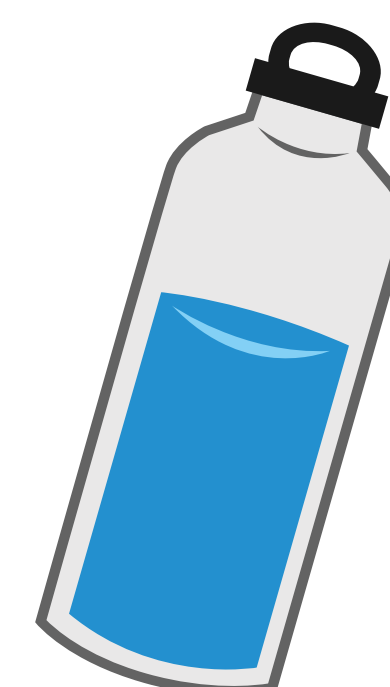
☐ Review restaurant menus with your team and discuss healthy choices before dining out.



☐ Pack healthy snacks and beverages for the road instead of stopping at a gas station or drive-through.



☐ Ask athletes to bring refillable water bottles labeled with their name.



Creating Healthy  
Asian American Communities  
in Michigan



This guide was created by EMU  
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EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

**Center for Health Disparities  
Innovations and Studies**