



The Healthiest Cheerleader

Becoming a strong healthy cheerleader does not start on the competition floor, nor does it even start at practice. A cheerleader becomes healthy and strong by eating right. As everyone knows, food fuels the body, but with the right combination of food, a body can maintain a much healthier balance, especially growing bodies that participate in highly active sports. Not only does eating the right food make your body strong and healthy, but it can also make you mentally sharp, which is beneficial at school as well as practice, forming one well rounded individual. By choosing the right foods daily you are helping prevent injury and fatigue, therefore allowing yourself to be the strongest cheerleader possible.

Below are some do's and don'ts on how to make your body practice ready.

DON'T:

- **Don't Skip meals:** It is much better to have three well balanced meals, and several nutritious small snacks throughout the day, your metabolism actually slows down when you are not regularly eating. Conditioning and working out are going to be a lot simpler if your body is getting the amount of calories it needs daily. The amount of calories needed depends on age and gender.

Age (Female)	Estimated Calorie Needs
4-8 years old	1400-1800 calories
9-13 years old	1600-2200 calories
14-18 years old	2000-2400 calories
19-30 years old	2000-2400 calories

- **Don't Consider Soda part of you daily water intake:** Soda actually depletes nutrients in your body that are the most beneficial, the big one is calcium. Without calcium your teeth will rot, and the risk of sprains and breaks are increased due to lack of nutrients in your bones. To stay properly hydrated you should intake 2 cups of water prior to practice and plenty of water after practice (your urine should maintain a straw like-color).
- **Don't Think skinny means healthy:** What we do involves muscles, meaning nice toned bodies. You do not need to be stick skinny by any means to be an amazing athlete. If you

are not taking in the proper amount of food to maintain your weight and muscle build, your body will actually start to get the nutrients from any source it can (your body will literally begin to eat your own muscles), meaning again weak muscles and a higher risk for injury. You will more likely get fatigued quicker, and be tired much more often. Make sure you are eating your daily amount of calories and carbohydrates.

- **Don't Rely on sugar and fat filled school snacks to get you through the day:** Now that most of you are back in school, it is very important to maintain a balanced nutritious diet. Just because they sell it in the cafeteria, or on the snack cart, does not mean it is good for you. Avoid cookies, chips, candy, sodas, sugary drinks, and high fat foods typically sold in schools. To make life a little bit more simple bring your own food from home. By simply bringing small fruit and veggie snacks, and even low sugar power/protein bars you will be filling your body with healthy food instead of junk food.
- **Don't Live on fast food:** Fast food, Jamba Juice, and Coffee Drinks, are full of sugar, hidden fats, bad caffeine and much more that is not good for anyone, let alone any athlete. If fast food is your only option to eat, make sure you choose one that includes vegetables such as lettuce and tomatoes, and cut out mayonnaise based spreads and cheeses. Grilled chicken is a much better option than breaded or fried chicken, or high calorie, high fat burger patties. Even though Jamba Juice is made with real fruit, there is a large amount of sugar. To make a Jamba a bit healthier, choose the smaller size, and substitute the sugar-loaded sherberts with your favorite fruit or soy. Caffeine is a growing athlete's worse enemy! Caffeine actually will give you a temporary amount of energy, then cause you to crash and become even more fatigued than you already were. If you need an energy boost, try a glass of 100% juice or get a quick protein fix by eating a string cheese or a piece of fruit- your body will thank you.

DO:

- **Do Eat Breakfast:** If your day begins with a healthy breakfast you are less likely to become fatigued. By implementing fruit and whole grains in your daily morning routine, you will have enough energy right up until the last minute of practice. Be sure to include juice and/ or fruit in your morning routine. Here are some great options for mornings when you are on the go:
 - Whole grain breakfast cereal with non-fat milk and sliced bananas or fresh blue berries.
 - Low fat yogurt mixed with granola.
 - Instant oatmeal mixed with non-fat milk.
 - Whole wheat toast/ bagel topped with crunchy peanut butter.
- **Do Chose fruits and vegetables:** Fruits and vegetables contain a limitless amount of good energy, nutrients, and vitamins. About 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables

are needed daily. Decrease the amount of chips and junk snack foods by adding a piece of fruit or some crisp vegetables. Here are some great tips on how to implement fruits and veggies into your diet.

- Vegetables that are easy to carry and can be eaten quickly with little to no preparation are the best: celery, carrots, and cherry tomatoes.
- If vegetables are not your favorite, find a low-fat dressing to use as a dipping sauce.
- Low sodium V-8 juice provides a fast dose of your daily vegetables.
- Bananas, small oranges, apples, grapes, and strawberries are all very portable.
- You can even buy frozen fruit and make your own healthy smoothies at home.
- **Do Get plenty of Calcium:** Even if you do not like milk, it does not mean that you have to all together cut calcium out of your diet. There are plenty of healthy ways to get calcium into your diet without drinking milk.
 - Add fruit to low fat yogurt
 - Use spinach leaves in your salad or on your sandwiches
 - Drink calcium-fortified orange juice
 - Look for breads or cereals that are calcium fortified

It is very important to make sure that you have calcium in your diet. If you are lacking calcium your bones lose their density and in turn you are at a greater risk for a break or sprain. When choosing a type of milk, go for a non-fat, low fat, or soy milk; anything else contains high levels of saturated fats which we all know is not what we want in our bodies.

- **Do Eat a well rounded dinner:** A well rounded meal includes a fruit, veggie, whole grain, protein and dairy. Find different and fun ways to add fruits, and veggies into your meals. Using whole grain pasta, rice, and bread will give you much more fuel. Make sure you have a least one item from each food group in your dinner; it does not need to be a lot just a couple pieces will do the job. The healthy dinner you eat at night will turn into energy for the next day.
- **Do Read the ingredients:** When looking for a healthy snack, make sure you know what is going into your body. If you cannot pronounce an ingredient with ease, it is probably not good for you. BEWARE of high fructose corn syrup, it is just bad sugar. Products that are made with natural ingredients are a much better choice By limiting or even eliminating sugar and fat loaded snacks, you will be allowing your body to produce the energy you need for every practice night.

How to be competition ready!

We spend a lot of time preparing for competition, from perfecting our routine at practice, to looking our best on the day of competition; a lot of work goes into competing, making it even more important to eat the right foods the night before, and day of a competition.

- **The Day Before:** Stay Hydrated!! Drink plenty of water all day long, avoid soda and caffeinated beverages, and activities that will deplete your body of water (hot tubs, strenuous workouts).
- **The Night Before:**
 - Choose a dinner that is high in Carbs: Carbohydrates are stored in your body for a duration of time, allowing you to perform at your maximum potential. Eating enough carbs will keep you going throughout the entire competition. Foods that are a great source of carbohydrates:
 - Wheat Pasta
 - Brown Rice
 - Whole Wheat Bread
 - Be sure to add Protein: Meats and beans contain a great source of protein. Protein carries an adequate source of iron, which is very important in the diet of young females. Without an adequate amount of iron anemia can occur, which causes fainting, weakness, and fatigue. Foods that are a great source of protein and do not contain high levels of saturated fats:
 - Skinless Chicken
 - Fish
 - Beans
 - Legumes
 - Nuts and Seeds
 - Soy Products/ Tofu
 - Don't forget the fruits and veggies: It is very important to avoid acidic fruits and vegetable the night before a competition. When nerves set in, the acidity left over from the food turns into an upset stomach. Stick with lighter fruits and veggies such as:
 - Corn on the Cob
 - Green Beans
 - Salad
 - Baked potatoes
 - Apples
 - Pears

- Peaches
 - Bananas
 - Grapes
 - Melons
- **The Morning Of:**
 - Having the right breakfast is very important: Use the list of suggestions above and know that your body will need to take time in order to digest the food that you are putting into it. It is best to allow your body 2 hours before competing in order to digest the food you have eaten.
- **The Snacks:** Healthy snacking provides the calories and glucose your body needs to enhance performance. Snacks should be approximately 200 calories each. And timing is important; stop snacking half an hour before competing to enable your stomach to empty. Snacking every two to three hours throughout the day will replace the lunchtime meal while providing a regular fuel source for the body. Some great snack ideas:
 - String cheese and an apple
 - A cereal bar and low-fat milk
 - Trail mix (dried fruit, nuts, cereal and pretzels)
 - Apple and peanut butter
 - Half a sandwich (meat, peanut butter and jelly, or cheese)
 - Low-fat yogurt and fruit
 - Bread sticks and cheese
 - Bagel and peanut butter
 - Frozen grapes or juice/ fruit such as watermelon
 - Peanut butter and crackers
 - Low-fat granola bars and fruit
 - Low-fat pudding
 - Ginger snap cookies or graham crackers
 - Low-fat cottage cheese and canned fruit
 - Low-fat granola and yogurt
 - Veggies and low-fat dip

Want to know more?

Log on to www.mypyramid.gov. This site provides factual information pertaining to all your food needs. Also, with the My Pyramid tracker you can actually enter your daily food intake to determine how well you are meeting your nutrient requirements.

Written by: Tara Olson

Reviewed by: Jessica Hodge, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Folsom Lake College