

# CHEERLEADING NUTRITION FACT SHEET



Cheerleading has proven to be one of the most dynamic, strenuous, physical, and technical activities in the country. It is essential for cheerleaders to provide their bodies with the proper nutrients. In turn, they will be rewarded with higher energy for intense team practices; increased muscle mass for stronger, more stable stunts and powerful tumbling passes; and faster recovery so they can do it all again the next day! A successful performance nutrition plan consists of several components: wholesome meals that include high-quality carbohydrates, proteins, and fats; proper hydration strategies; energy-boosting mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks; and, most importantly, post-workout and practice recovery nutrition. When these components are incorporated in a consistent manner, cheerleaders are more likely to reach both their fitness and performance goals.

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# ENERGY INTAKE

When reading about each macronutrient, visualize a double-base stunt. Cheerleaders know that most double-base stunts are comprised of three positions: 2 bases, 1 back-spot, and 1 flyer. Just as each position in the stunt group plays a special and essential job in supporting the stunt sequence, each macronutrient plays a unique function in the body. Despite their unique roles, the macronutrients work in sync to carry out all of the body's metabolic needs.



**Macronutrient Table**

Macronutrient & Stunt Position Comparison	Macronutrient	Stunt Position
Carbohydrates = 2 Bases	<b>Carbohydrates</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make up the largest percentage of diet</li><li>• Main source of energy for the body, aiding in stamina and endurance</li></ul>	<b>Bases</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 of the 4 individuals in the stunt are bases</li><li>• Requires significant strength and stamina for lifting and transitioning the stunt sequence</li></ul>
Protein = Back-spot	<b>Protein</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plays a crucial role in building, maintaining, &amp; repairing body tissue</li><li>• Aids in muscle strength</li></ul>	<b>Back-spot</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Position that provides much of the stability to the stunt</li><li>• Requires much strength in order to protect the flyer's head and shoulders and prevent injury</li></ul>
Fat = Flyer	<b>Fat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Energy-efficient nutrient; small amount yields higher calories/energy than carbs and protein</li><li>• Protects internal organs and body temperature</li><li>• 'Heart-healthy' types of fats are essential for immune and brain health</li></ul>	<b>Flyer</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually the smallest individual in the stunt group</li><li>• Despite small size, the flyer requires just as much energy, stamina, &amp; skill as other positions</li><li>• Must maintain healthy body fat % for protection due to the nature of the position (landing hard from tosses and cradles)</li></ul>

# HYDRATION STRATEGIES

Hydration is a continual process. Begin drinking fluids first thing in the morning and continually hydrate as the day goes on. This ensures a fully hydrated body going into practice or an event. Cheerleaders who wait until they feel thirsty to start drinking fluids may already be on the verge of dehydration.



## 1. Pre-Hydration

- Coaches/captains should plan hydration stations in the practice area or require the team to bring their own water bottles.
- Incorporating foods and fluids with a high electrolyte content into cheerleaders' daily meals is the best way to ensure optimal hydration:
  - Water
  - Electrolyte beverage (i.e., Gatorade™, PowerAde™)
  - Coconut water
  - Milk
  - Yogurt
  - Bananas
  - Pretzels
  - Lightly salted popcorn
  - Canned soup
  - Saltine crackers
  - Deli meat (i.e., turkey, ham)
  - Trail mix: lightly salted nuts, dried fruit, granola, etc.
  - Beef jerky
  - If prone to cramping, can add salt, soy sauce, or other high-sodium spices to meals

- Monitor hydration by looking at urine color
  - Urine that has the color of lemonade signifies hydrated. Urine with the color of apple juice signifies dehydrated, meaning the cheerleader needs to drink more fluids.

## 2. Mid-Hydration

- Water is sufficient for practices or events lasting one hour or less.
- An electrolyte drink may be warranted for practices or events lasting longer than one hour and/or if they are cheering in hot, humid conditions.

## 3. Rehydration

- Rehydration can help cheerleaders recover from practice or workout, prepare for the next practice or workout, and reduce risks associated with dehydration.
- The goal of rehydration is to fully replenish any fluid and electrolyte deficit.
- If weight was lost during practice or the event, drink 16–24 ounces of fluid per pound lost.

## BODY COMPOSITION

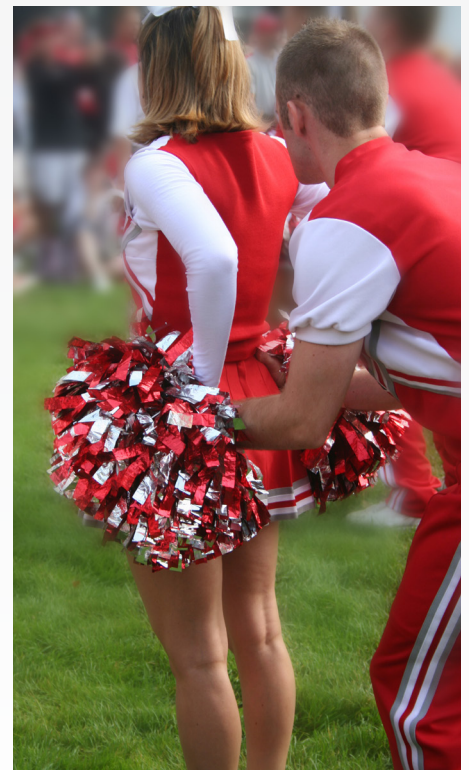
Cheerleaders can change the amount of body weight, lean mass, and/or body fat in a healthy, performance-enhancing manner if their goals are set appropriately by a trustworthy professional (i.e., a registered dietitian).

Cheerleading is a high-intensity sport, physically as well as mentally. In addition, there is a vast emphasis on appearance, which usually generates the desire to become thin (typically females) and an obsession with muscularity (typically males). As a result, it is common for cheerleaders of any age, gender, and/or ethnicity to attain distorted body images and potentially develop disordered eating patterns or full-on eating disorders. Coaches and parents need to be aware that cheerleaders are included in the category of “athletes at highest risk” for eating disorders. Eating disorder education and prevention are the keys to keeping cheerleaders healthy and mindful of the dangers associated with eating disorders.



## TRYOUTS

Tryout preparation typically consists of intense training and preparation (in addition to nervousness). Because of the amount of physical activity and energy expended during this training period, it is essential that cheerleaders keep their bodies properly fueled in order to maintain strength and energy levels. Cheerleaders who are preparing for tryouts should eat three wholesome meals plus mid-day and post-training recovery snacks. Proper hydration is essential in keeping the body cool and resistant to dehydration and the symptoms associated with it. Eating adequate meals and snacks on the day(s) of tryouts is equally important. If there is a reduction in appetite the day of tryouts, cheerleaders may want to choose a liquid-based meal replacement or bland, easily digestible solid foods, such as a fruit & yogurt smoothie, toast and peanut butter, a turkey wrap, a granola bar, or trail mix.



## SAMPLE TRYOUT TRAINING-DAY EATING REGIMEN:

Meal	Sample
Breakfast	Whole wheat bagel sandwich with eggs, cheese, turkey sausage + fresh fruit salad + milk and water
Mid-morning snack	Low-fat Greek yogurt topped with almonds + water
Lunch	Turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread + Wheat Thins and baby carrots dipped in hummus + water
Pre-training snack	Banana topped with peanut butter + water
Post-training recovery snack	Low-fat chocolate milk + ½ PBJ sandwich + water
Dinner	Side salad (lots of vegetables) + grilled shrimp or chicken + stir-fry vegetables + over brown rice

## SAMPLE EATING REGIMEN FOR THE DAY OF TRYOUTS:

Meal	Sample
Breakfast	Bowl of oatmeal + whole wheat toast with peanut butter topped with banana slices + milk and water
Snack during a break at tryouts	Dried fruit, nuts, pretzels trail mix + water/sports drink
Lunch	Grilled chicken wrap + baked chips + fruit cup + water
Snack during a break at tryouts	String cheese and whole grain crackers + water/sports drink
Dinner	Side salad (lots of vegetables) + lean beef meat sauce + whole grain spaghetti + green beans + dinner roll + dessert of choice

## PRACTICE

Whether a team is practicing for competition, sports games, or a simple pep rally, cheerleaders need to continue to fuel their bodies to ensure strength and energy are always at their maximum. Depending on practice times, cheerleaders should eat three wholesome meals plus mid-day and post-training recovery snacks in addition to proper hydration.

## SAMPLE PRE-PRACTICE MEALS/SNACKS:

### Pre-Workout Snacks (30–60 minutes before)

- Rice cake topped with 1–2 tablespoons of peanut butter and banana or fruit of choice
- Yogurt parfait (Greek yogurt, fruit, and granola)
- Trail mix (1/4 cup mixed nuts with dried cranberries and dark chocolate chips!)
- Half an English muffin topped with 1–2 tablespoons of almond or peanut butter and a 1 tablespoon of jelly/jam
- Rice cake topped with 1–2 tablespoons of hummus and a couple slices of deli turkey
- Granola bar
- Whole wheat crackers topped with cheese
- Whole wheat toast with ½ avocado smashed on top and a hardboiled egg

### Pre-Workout Meals (1–2 hours before)

- ½ cup of oatmeal with walnuts, berries, and cinnamon
- 2 whole wheat waffles with 1–2 tablespoons peanut butter and banana
- Whole wheat wrap with chicken, veggies, and mustard
- ½ cup of brown rice, lean meat, and veggies
- Bowl of whole grain cereal with low fat milk and fruit
- Whole wheat bagel with cream cheese and fresh fruit
- Whole wheat pasta with sautéed shrimp and veggies
- Grilled chicken, turkey, or roast beef sandwich on whole wheat bread (with plenty of veggies)
- Tuna salad sandwich on thin whole wheat bagel with tomatoes and spinach

## SAMPLE MID-PRACTICE SNACKS:

### Mid-Workout Snacks (Quickly and Easily Digestible Foods)

- Banana
- Dried fruit
- Grapes
- Orange slices
- Granola bar
- Energy gummies or gel
- Squeezable apple sauce



## SAMPLE POST-PRACTICE RECOVERY MEALS/SNACKS:

### Post-Workout Meal/Snack (30–60 minutes post)

- Fruit smoothie (frozen fruit blended with Greek yogurt and low-fat milk or almond milk)
- Veggie omelet with a piece of wheat toast
- 8–12-ounce low-fat chocolate milk
- Protein pancake (Mix 4 egg whites, ½ cup rolled oats, ½ cup low fat-cottage cheese, 1/8 teaspoon baking powder, and ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract. Cook on preheated griddle (medium-low heat) until it bubbles, then flip and cook another 30–60 seconds. Top with fresh berries or sliced banana.)
- Green smoothie (blend 4 cups spinach, ½ cup vanilla bean yogurt, 1 cup almond milk, 1 banana, and 1 tablespoon peanut butter with ice)
- Greek yogurt topped with granola and/or nuts
- PBJ sandwich
- Chicken stir fry (chicken and fresh veggies sautéed together and served over brown rice)
- Whole wheat pita, 2 tablespoons of hummus, sliced turkey, and spinach
- Baked salmon filet with ½ cup brown rice and spinach salad

## GAMES

Cheerleaders should fuel, hydrate, and recover their bodies just as they would for a practice. Halftime may be a time when cheerleaders can eat a quick snack to help boost energy levels for the second half. Pack nutritious and energy-enhancing snacks.

### Halftime Snack Ideas:

- Granola bars
- ½ PBJ sandwiches
- Bananas
- Grapes
- Oranges
- Finger sandwiches
- Fig Newtons



## COMPETITION

Months of choreography, skill training, conditioning, and perfecting every move usually come down to about 2 minutes and 30 seconds on the mat. Cheerleaders want to walk onto the floor with absolute confidence knowing that they did everything possible, and that includes proper and consistent fueling. Planning ahead and packing snacks is the best way to ensure wholesome, energy-packed, familiar foods and prevent any risk of stomach discomfort, sickness, or fatigue from the processed concession items.

### Sample Competition Snacks:

- Granola bars
- PBJ sandwiches
- Turkey wraps
- Pretzels
- Fresh fruit
- Yogurt
- Trail mix
- Hummus and crackers
- Bottles of water and electrolyte sports drinks

