



# FUELING YOUR YOUNG SKATER

A little know-how combined with a few guiding steps will help you meet the dietary growth and development needs of your young athlete

by Ashley Leone

**F**eeding young athletes requires knowledge and preparation. They need optimum fueling for training and competition to meet their energy demands and to accommodate their growth and development. Let's learn about the right fuel for your young figure skater to help stoke that fire.

## The Role of Nutrition

Foremost, young skaters need to eat to meet the demands of growth and development. A good diet will also help shield against illness and injury. I spoke with former Olympic skater and current skating coach at the Richmond Training Centre and mother of two, Joséé Chouinard, about feeding child athletes.

## Prepare With a Healthy Diet

According to Joséé, who grew up in a household surrounded by healthy food choices, your athlete's home environment is vital and an easy way to impact their future performance and health. She recommends establishing healthy nutrition habits early on in their developmental years and in a few fundamental ways.

## Teach Your Skater Healthy Behaviour and Skills

- Include them in grocery store trips and meal preparation.
- Eat with your child.
- Make the same meal for the entire family.
- Encourage your skater to pack his or her lunch and snacks on their own.
- Model positive food-behaviour to help your child develop a healthy relationship with food and to help limit future, body-image issues.

## Include Wholesome Foods and Strategies

- Encourage your skater to eat five to six times per day. For mealtime training, split meals and eat half before and after each workout. Joséé's tip: cut your sandwich into four pieces and eat a quarter during each training break.
- Choose fresh foods like vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean meats, legumes and dairy. Joséé's tip: chop veggies for snacks and meals every Sunday so that they are handy during the week.
- Limit sweets and fried food. Joséé's tip: cook fruit in your entrees to help satisfy sweet cravings to eliminate dessert.
- Include ample fluids, especially before, during and after exercise. Water is best, but flavouring encourages consumption. You can use sports drinks and diluted juice. Joséé's tip: flavour your water with a dissolvable, chewable, citrus vitamin C tablet.
- Use food and not sports supplements.
- Be mindful of calcium, vitamin D and iron. These nutrients support bone health, muscle and nerve function and energy, respectively.

## Training and Competition Nutrition

Nutrition for competition requires planning to ensure appropriate food choices and timing.

## Pre-Competition

- Choose a high-carbohydrate, low-fat meal three to four hours before competition.
- Practice nutrition during training phases to learn what works best for the competition cycle. Joséé says she preferred a lean protein meal with vegetables a few hours before she skated.
- Consider a bigger meal six to seven hours before skating with a smaller meal three to four hours before ice time.

## Recovery

- Protein and carbohydrate snacks are important within 15-60 minutes of training.
- This combination replenishes muscle energy stores in the form of glycogen and helps with muscle building.

## Transition by Maintaining

Support the healthy habits formed during training in transition times, like competition and in between seasons. In Joséé's words, "the body is like an engine, your children have to put the right fuel in to get the results they want."

Your role is to feed your young figure skater well-balanced meals, to model good food behaviour and to teach them how to manage their own nutrition healthfully.