

Homemade Cherry Oat Protein Bar: A Delicious Way to Fuel Up for Practice

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BEEP, BEEP, BEEP! Your alarm gets you out of bed in the morning.

BRRINNG! BRRINNG! The school bell tells you when to switch classes during the school day.

GRRRRRRR! Suddenly, it's time for after-school practice, but your stomach is growling, and you're feeling a bit sluggish. You realize you didn't eat enough during the day to perform your best at practice. What you need is some "food fuel" before exercise to help your body keep up the intensity of training.

What Should Student Athletes Eat to Fuel for After-School Practice?

Before a workout, it is important to give your body foods that contain both carbohydrates and protein. Carbohydrates provide your muscles with energy to use during exercise. They are found in foods like breads, grains, cereals, and starchy vegetables.

Since our muscles are made of protein, including this nutrient as part of your before-practice snack helps to ensure your body has enough to prevent muscle protein breakdown during training. Protein is found in dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese; meats like beef, pork, and chicken; eggs; and plant foods like beans and other legumes.

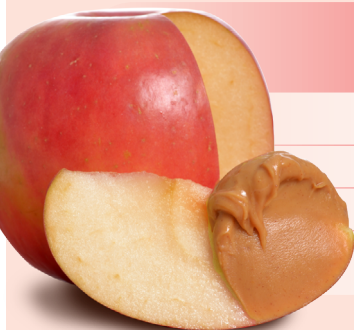
For a well-balanced snack, pair a carbohydrate-rich food with a good source of protein after school as your "food fuel" during practice. Below are some examples. Mix and match from the two columns to create your favorite combination! Make sure to drink some water to stay hydrated, too.

GOOD SOURCES OF CARBOHYDRATES

Fresh fruit (apple, banana, grapes)
Graham crackers
Granola
Dried fruit (i.e., fruit leather)

GOOD SOURCES OF PROTEIN

Peanut butter
Greek yogurt
Cheese cubes or sticks
Nuts (cashews, almonds, pistachios)



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Another easy after-school snack is an energy or protein bar. Look for varieties that contain both carbohydrate and protein or make a homemade bar. I'm sharing my favorite, 5-ingredient Homemade Cherry Oat Protein Bar recipe. Make a batch on Sunday and eat them after school throughout the week. Depending on the size of the bar, you can eat 1-2 at a time. You may want to eat one before practice and save one for afterwards.

Homemade Cherry Oat Protein Bar

Makes: 12 protein bars

Ingredients:

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| 1 cup Greek yogurt, any flavor | 1 cup old-fashioned oats |
| 1-2 scoops (approximately 25-50 grams) vanilla-flavored whey protein powder | 2 tablespoons dried cherries, chopped into bite-sized pieces |
| | 2 tablespoons honey |

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Use a baking sheet that is coated with non-stick spray or lined with parchment paper. Another option if you love making your own snack bars is to use a baking sheet with bar-sized inserts.
2. In a large bowl, stir the yogurt and protein powder together.
3. Add in oats and dried fruit; mix well.
4. On the baking sheet, form the mixture into bar shapes in the size you prefer.
5. Using a spoon, drizzle the honey around the edge and across the top of each bar.
6. Bake for about 20 minutes. The bars should have a slight golden-brown color from the oats and honey when they are done.
7. Let the bars cool completely; store in the fridge to keep them firm and fresh.



Recipe Notes:

- When it comes to whey protein, not all products are created equal. Look for a brand that has been third-party tested and includes either the "NSF Certified for Sport," "Informed Choice/Sport," or "USP" seal on the package.
- Any dried fruit will work for this recipe, so feel free to swap the cherries for your favorite.
- If you use plain Greek yogurt, I suggest adding ½ teaspoon vanilla extract for flavoring.



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