

Calgary Northstars Hockey Association: Sport Nutrition – FAQ's

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Q: Someone in the gym where I train told me to take creatine to gain weight, is that a good idea?

A: Technically, creatine is taken to speed up your recovery between physical efforts – such as between lifting sets in the gym or between hockey shifts – you may recover faster. It has been used by athletes for decades and basically works to restore energy (ATP). But if you recover faster then you can usually train harder, so indirectly you can gain weight with creatine, simply because you may be able to do more work in training. Plus, taking the large 20-25 gram loading dose can cause you to store water in your muscles – and this water weight will cause you to weigh more (but it's really not an increase in muscle fibres). That's why new research promotes a lower dose of creatine (0.1 gram for every kg body weight) taken ONCE a day for one MONTH. For example, a 150 lb (70 kg) athlete would take 7 grams once a day for a month – this lower dose tends to decrease the potential with storing water weight in your muscles. FYI, there's no research to indicate the safety of creatine use by athletes under 18 years of age.

Q: I've been trying to put on weight for the past 3 months, but my weight hasn't budged. What would you suggest to gain weight?

A: Your situation is not uncommon, Bantam and Midget players need between 3500-4000 calories a day just to maintain weight, since 14-18 years of age is when you have your greatest energy demands (growth & development). Here are a few suggestions you can try to put on weight: eat 6 to 7 times a day with your snacks as mini-meals, but this should be 24/7 (weekends & days off too!). Choose, healthy, energy-dense foods that give you the most calories with the least volume (e.g. cheese, nuts, peanut or almond butter, smoothies, sandwiches, protein bars, granola, ice cream!). Make sure to have protein at ALL meals and at bedtime; have 2 powershakes/smoothies daily, plus try to eat beyond the feeling of "fullness" – have at least 5 more bites. Limit foods and fluids that fill you up (pop, slurpees, too much water) at a time when you are trying to eat a lot. Check you weight about 2 times a week to monitor your progress. If you're still not gaining then keep food records to be accountable to yourself! **P.S.** A plan to build muscle AND reduce body fat would be different – this plan would be choosing lean protein (sandwiches, leftovers) for snacks and not going overboard with high fat foods (cheese, peanut or almond butter), since excess dietary fat is easily stored as body fat.

Q: I heard sports drinks are full of sugar and aren't good for you, is that true?

A: "True" sports drink, e.g., Gatorade, Powerade, eLoad, etc. are carbohydrate-electrolyte beverages. They're designed to restore the **energy** (carbohydrates - sugar), **electrolytes** (sodium, potassium), and **fluids** that you lose when physically working hard. Surprisingly, most sports drinks don't even contain enough sodium to replenish what's lost in sweat, with the exception of eLoad. Sports drinks are not designed to have with meals or for snacking, instead there are 3 specific times when sports drinks are known to be effective (based on research). Within the hour before exercise sports drinks boost energy levels; during training/games/practices that exceed 1 hour sports drinks help maintain energy and hydration; and finally sports drinks will restore fluids, energy, electrolytes faster than water and superior to juice (exception might be vegetable V8 juice). And what about chocolate or flavoured milk for recovery compared to sports drinks? Ideally you want both protein and carbs in your recovery nutrition (flavoured milk offers both), but for full recovery you could have a sports drink and add a protein bar – which would work as well as the flavoured milk. BTW, the product G2 doesn't have any carbohydrates and will not restore energy like regular Gatorade.