



Our thanks to Sarah Chantler,  
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# Role of the Coach in Nutrition

We know the powerful impact sport has on young people. As a coach, you are a significant role model in your athlete's life. Eating well is part of every developing athlete's progression and as such you have a role to play in ensuring the promotion of good habits and nutritional information for your athlete.



**Ask the right questions.** Often coaches will prescribe what's 'healthy' eating, or what's the 'right choice'. Consider allowing for your athletes to eat as they feel and ask them questions regarding their choices and how they made the decision. There is often so much online moralising around healthy foods or fads, and little recognition that each person comes from a different food environment. By asking the right question, you may find out where the knowledge gaps are (eg **"I don't know which food is for energy"**) or if there is a lack of nutrition literacy (eg **"I don't know how to choose the right one"**).

**Recognise that you are an eating role model too.** As with most things in life, you do have to practise what you preach. If you are encouraging homemade food and snacks as part of the eating environment, then you must aim for the same. If you say that fruit and veggies are important, then you must believe this enough to do the same. There is no perfection in eating – but there are definitely better choices. Think about your choices during training, travel and competition, even the wrappers in your car.

**Be consistent.** You must keep the messages consistent and use words that are not technical, and nutrient-focused. Use food examples like a **'chicken wrap'** or **'spaghetti and meatballs'**, rather than **'protein-based snack'** and or **'high carbohydrate meal'**.

**Be curious.** Make sure you have a nutrition professional to ask when you need to check these messages are appropriate. Engage with practitioners that are up to date and aim not to rely on past players' or parents' experience when dealing with a range of athletes.

**Promote trial and error, with a clear approach.** The easiest process is to try something, see if it works, and then decide to keep or leave it. For impatient athletes, remind them that trialling anything around eating will take a while and they should be patient. Building new food items into their training snacks, travel plans or post-competition meal is a great way to learn and experience new foods.