

When it Comes to Food, Get Real

Curt Thompson MS, Dip. CN, CMTA
Author of the *Soccer Nutrition Handbook*

You know healthy eating is important to your wellness and soccer performance. But what is healthy eating? And why does it make such a difference?

Consider the two meals pictured below.

Condiments aside, the meal on the left has ten ingredients: Grilled chicken breast, broccoli, wild rice, lettuce, tomato, cucumber, red pepper, strawberries, blue berries and water. It consists of foods that were recently alive and growing, in a form close to how they exist in nature.

The meal on the right is made up of a hot dog with white bun, packaged macaroni and cheese, potato chips, cookies and juice. It's 100-plus ingredients include health-damaging chemicals, preservatives, artificial colors, flavors and sweeteners, and a host of other things you would be hard pressed to recognize or even pronounce.

In a Nutshell

- You are genetically designed to eat real foods.
- Real foods are minimally processed and recently alive and growing
- Industrial foods tend to be nutrient deficient and often contain unhealthy ingredients
- You need both the energy and nutrients from food for health and top soccer performance
- Make real food mostly what you eat.



REAL FOOD



INDUSTRIAL FOOD

For thousands of years, your ancestors ate real foods – foods they found in nature in their natural form. Your ancestors' genes, the same ones that adapted to thrive on real foods, have been passed on to you. So like it or not, you too are genetically designed to eat

real foods. And because real foods so effectively and efficiently fuel your body and mind, they are also the best foods to power-up your soccer performance.

Industrial foods have only been around for a handful of decades. They were spawned for reasons of convenience and profit, not health, and along with them has come epidemics of heart disease, obesity and diabetes. Most of these food-like products are highly processed and virtually devoid of performance-building nutrients. If you eat a lot of industrial food, you will be mal-nourished and feel physically and mentally drained. I don't know about you but that is not how I want to feel when I step onto a soccer field.

Real Foods

- Eggs, fish, chicken, turkey, beef, bison, pork
- Vegetables, whole fruits,
- Nuts, seeds
- Legumes (beans)
- Whole grains: wheat, wild rice, oats, quinoa

Real foods build health and soccer performance and industrial foods take it away.

Does this mean you can never eat industrial food again? Of course not. Just make the majority of what you eat real food and use industrial foods for convenience when the

Industrial Foods

- Doughnuts, French fries, soft drinks, chips, cookies, crackers and candy
- White bread, white rice, most pasta, most cereals, commercial baked goods
- Many commercial fruit and vegetable juices, most sport/energy drinks
- Most commercial soups, processed meats

situation limits access to real food. Using "lack of time" as an excuse to regularly eat industrial foods is self-defeating behavior so make time to eat real food.

Here is a simple, effective way to choose your food. Before you buy or eat it, answer this question: "Was it recently alive and growing and is it close to its natural form?" If the answer is yes, you are probably making a good food decision. We humans have been selecting our food that way for thousands of years, no sense fixing what isn't broke.

And for all you players out there who don't like vegetables, too bad. You don't like running sprints either but you do it because it makes you better. Eat your vegetables for the same reason. Your body will thank you for the rest of your life, and your sprints will get easier too.

Until next time – Be Well, Play Well.

About the Author

Curt Thompson is a practicing nutritionist and the author of the *Soccer Nutrition Handbook* (www.NutritionCoaches.com). He is also a nationally licensed soccer coach and runs the Advanced Training Program at FC Boulder in Colorado.