Off-season is a time to rest and relax from the stresses of the season, but that doesn’t mean it’s a time to neglect good nutrition practices. Eating healthy is important all year round!

**TIME TO TAKE A BREAK!**

Off-season is an important and useful time for all athletes. Excessive training without any time off can lead to burnout or overtraining. This can result in fatigue, poor athletic performance, altered mood, and loss of interest in practicing or playing games. Taking time off is essential in avoiding burnout. Off-season serves as the perfect opportunity to give your body a break from the stress of daily exercise. While off-season is a time to give your body a break that doesn’t mean it’s time to take a break from good nutrition. Maintaining a healthy diet throughout the off-season can benefit your body in preparation for the next season.

Oftentimes, with off-season comes a lot more spare time. This means more time to enjoy food and even help out in the kitchen! Using this time to enjoy food is important, but it is also important to be mindful about eating. Off-season should not be used as an excuse to overeat or eat excessive amounts of unhealthy foods. In fact, that kind of thinking can put some athletes at risk for weight gain, especially since the amount of energy expended during off-season is usually much less than during the season. It may be necessary to adjust the amount of food you eat to maintain your desired weight. For example, looking at the athlete’s plates as a guide, in the off-season it may be necessary to base meal plates off the easy training plate rather than the moderate training plate.

**Try Something New**

Trying new foods is fun and exciting, and the off-season is the perfect time to do this! Some athletes eat the same meals over and over without much variety. Eating a variety of foods is important to make sure you get all the nutrients your body needs. Carbohydrates supply the energy for your working muscles, and grains are a good source of carbohydrates. Add some variety to your diet by trying some of these lesser-used grains:

- Amaranth
- Buckwheat
- Spelt
- Millet
- Bulgur

Search the Internet for recipes that use these grains then look for them at your grocery store.
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**WHAT NOW?**

Now that you are enjoying a break from lacrosse you might be wondering what to do to make yourself better for next season. During your off time participate in other activities that you enjoy but don’t have time for in-season. Plan different days for biking, hiking, kayaking, frisbee, or a run with a friend. Staying active with different activities will help maintain your fitness level and re-charge you for lacrosse season again.

Maintaining a healthy diet will help prepare you for next season as well. As an adolescent athlete your body may still be growing, but extra weight gain during the off-season can make staying fit or getting back into shape a lot harder. While allowing for normal growth, try to keep your weight fairly stable throughout the off-season. Eat foods that you enjoy, but avoid eating excessive amounts of unhealthy foods such as chips, cookies, cakes, dessert breads and muffins, candy, and sugary beverages such as soda or energy drinks. There is no need to focus on the scale; by simply staying active and eating healthy you will be in good shape for next season.

If one of your goals is to gain muscle mass, the off-season may be a good time to focus on this. While everyone wants and expects results quickly muscle development takes time. Some athletes may think the off-season is the right time for dietary supplements, but remember the risks associated with dietary supplements. There is no magic supplement that will make your muscles grow twice as fast. In order for muscles to grow, the appropriate training plan will need to be paired with good nutrition. Protein and carbohydrates are important for muscle growth. If you don’t eat enough carbohydrates your body will start to break down muscle to use as energy. Protein is important to stimulate muscle rebuilding and growth. To gain muscle you will need to consume more energy (calories) than you are using, but depending on your weight training plan you may still be expending less energy than when practicing on the field everyday. Therefore, it is important to be smart about your food choices so that you don’t end up with unnecessary weight gain. Be realistic with off-season goals to make sure you are re-charged for next season.

**Mix It Up**

The fruits and vegetables portion is the largest section on the easy training plate. You may be wondering how you could fill that section without eating the same fruits and vegetables everyday. To mix things up, check out your local farmers market during the summer months to pick up some fresh and seasonal fruits and vegetables. Depending on where you live you might be able to find:

- Cherries
- Plums, apricots, and peaches
- Blackberries and raspberries
- Cantaloupe and watermelon

Try to find a vegetable you have never tasted before. Look for:

- Eggplant and zucchini
- Okra
- Bell peppers
- Green beans and peas
- Heirloom tomatoes
- Corn on the cob

Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables are very delicious and can be eaten as part of your meal or eaten on their own as a snack.