

GET READY FOR FOOTBALL!

With the start Falcons training camp just around the corner, it's never too early for players to start preparing themselves physically for those scorching hot weeks in August when they will be tested not only for their football skills, but also for their speed, strength and endurance on the field. To help Falcons parents' help their players be at their best for team evaluations, below is an article from [USA Football](#) that suggests running and endurance drills that are designed to help football players in particular. Hint: These don't involve long, leisurely jogs since this sport is all about explosion and acceleration...

Sprints Best Training for This Sport

Running long distances is a strong cardiovascular workout and definitely can make your muscles start begging you to stop.

For football players, though, this isn't the type of lung and muscle burn that will make the fourth quarter easier. The way endurance athletes -- runners, cyclists, swimmers -- train for their sport is very different from the way football players should train to increase their endurance.

When a player has to explode off the line and uproot the opponent in front of him, his body quickly recruits the fast-twitch fibers in his muscle to do that work because the slow twitch ones just can't contract powerfully enough to cut it.

In contrast, during a 5-mile run, the body recruits the slow-twitch fibers in muscles because running doesn't demand powerful contractions -- it just asks for lots of them. A marathoner trains for aerobic endurance, but a football player trains for anaerobic endurance.

Put simply, long distance running really only makes you better at one thing - running long distances.

The following are examples of endurance workouts to use with football players from youth football to the NFL. Do these two to three times a week and start steamrolling your opponents in the fourth quarter.

BARRIER SPRINTS

Place two cones 10 to 15 yards apart on a forgiving surface -- grass, sand, turf, etc.

Then put a barrier of some sort between the cones. A low hurdle, cardboard box or gym bag will do.

Starting at one cone, sprint to the other, jumping over the barrier in the process. Run back and forth until you've jumped the barrier eight times. Rest and repeat.

For variety, try backpedaling, shuffling or carioca, too. Jump the barrier multiple times with each pass to make this workout really brutal.

Quick Tip: When you switch directions at each cone, always touch the ground. By getting low on turns, you'll make yourself stronger and more powerful at a lower center of gravity. You'll be able to generate more force from your 3-point stance as a result.

JUMP ROPE SERIES

Jumping rope is one of the best endurance exercises for football players. The key is to add enough variety to make it both challenging and interesting. Try this series on for size, performing each variation for 30 seconds:

Two-footed jumps;

Cross-country skier jumps;

Slalom skier jumps;

Double-under jumps (moving the rope underneath you twice in one jump);

Eyes-closed jumps (any kind) for 30 seconds;

Two-footed jumps moving forward for 40 yards and backward for the same distance.

--Rett Larson, expert, sports performance training, USA Football

Eat Well to Play Well



Along with proper physical conditioning, Falcons players need to start putting the right foods inside their bodies, so they can perform well during training camp. Below is an article from [USA Football](#) that offers 10 tips on how to eat in ways that will bring out the best in every Falcons player...

Habit No. 1: Eat every three hours

If all you eat is breakfast, lunch and dinner, you are setting yourself up for energy spikes and lulls throughout the day as your body first reacts to sugar influx, then waits for the next huge dose. By simply

adding a more substantial pre- and post-workout meal, you're on your way to eating more often.

Habit No. 2: Eat complete meals

All you need are the three basics -- carbohydrates, protein and fat -- but you need them at every meal because they work together to give athletes energy. Plus, you'll be fuller and more satiated eating that way.

Habit No. 3: Have a good breakfast

Breakfast can raise your metabolism for the whole day - - so steer clear of the sugar that you will find in most breakfast drinks, such as orange juice and grande Mocha Frappuccinos.

Habit No. 4: Eat veggies with every meal

There's no need to take a multivitamin if you can adopt this one. Vegetables should be your primary source of carbohydrates since they release sugar and energy slowly. It's almost impossible to overeat vegetables, so saddle-up to that side of the buffet and have at it.

Habit No. 5: Don't drink calories

When pro athletes need to lose weight, the first thing they are told to do is stop drinking soda, juice, energy drinks and creamy coffees. Free refills may seem like a good idea for those trying to pinch pennies, but it's too easy to pack on liquid calories if you don't monitor your intake.

Habit No. 6: Eat protein at every meal

Protein is the key to repairing muscle, but make sure you pick the right ones. As a general rule, the fewer legs the animal has -- fish as opposed to chicken as opposed

to pork or beef -- the better. Eat at least one serving with every meal.

Habit: No. 7: Eat fats that give back

Athletes need about 20 percent to 70 percent of their calories to come from healthy fats, because they actually can decrease your body fat and boost your immunity. Good fats come from olive oil, avocado and flax seed, to name a few.

Habit No. 8: Have a plan

Most eating strategies are derailed because athletes don't plan their meals ahead of time. If you make your own food you'll know exactly what goes into it and how much you can have. Having healthy snacks such as nuts, jerky or fruit on hand can go a long way to keeping your body lean.

Habit No. 9: Select your carbs with care

Carbohydrates are a common pitfall for athletes. If you want to have more muscle, carbs are OK, but if you want to lose fat, limit them. Most people don't realize that it's the bread on your hamburger or sandwich that is hurting your energy levels more than what is inside.

Habit No. 10: Stick to 90 percent

When changing your eating strategy, don't try to change everything at once, because you'll get overwhelmed and fail. Stick to your healthy habits 90 percent of the time and give yourself the occasional treat that will keep you consistent for the long term.

--Rett Larson, expert, sports performance training, USA Football

Stay Cool When Training in the Heat



Last but not least, during the hot days of training camp, proper hydration is critical to the health of every Falcons player. Below is an article from [Mayo Clinic](#) that tells parents and players how to avoid the dangers of dehydration...

Learn who's at risk of dehydration — and how to prevent it.

Children don't adapt as well as adults do to exercise in hot, humid weather. They produce more heat, sweat less and might be less likely to drink enough fluids during exercise — increasing the risk of dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. You don't need to worry from the sidelines, though. Understand how heat-related problems happen and what steps you can take to prevent them.

Risk factors for dehydration

Any child who exercises in the heat might be at risk of dehydration. The concern is often greatest for young athletes who participate in sports that require wearing full protective gear, such as football, or that involve playing in a hot environment.

Your child might be particularly vulnerable to dehydration and other heat-related illnesses in a hot environment if he or she:

- ***Rarely exercises***
- ***Is overweight or obese***
- ***Is sick***
- ***Is taking certain supplements or medications, such as cold medicine***
- ***Has had a previous heat-related illness***

Acclimating to the heat

Heat-related problems are most likely within the first few days of practice in a hot environment. That's why it's best to take it easy at first, gradually increasing the amount of activity – and the amount of protective equipment – as the days pass. Young athletes might need up to two weeks to safely acclimate to the heat.

During hot and humid conditions, coaches are encouraged to:

- ***Require young athletes to drink plenty of fluids before practice and during regular beverage breaks – even if they aren't thirsty***
- ***Make sure clothing is light-colored, lightweight and loose fitting, or exposes as much of the skin as possible***
- ***Decrease or stop practices or competitions if necessary, or move them indoors or to a shady area***
- ***Know when to slow down – or call it quits***

To determine when heat and humidity make strenuous exercise risky for young athletes, your child's coach might monitor the wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) – the standard index of temperature and humidity combined. If the WBGT is too high, outdoor athletic activities might need to be limited or canceled.

Spotting dehydration and other heat-related problems

Even mild dehydration can affect your child's athletic performance and make him or her lethargic and irritable. Left untreated, dehydration increases the risk of other heat-related illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

Encourage your child to pay attention to early signs and symptoms of dehydration, including:

- ***Dry or sticky mouth***
- ***Thirst***
- ***Headache***
- ***Dizziness***
- ***Cramps***
- ***Excessive fatigue***

Remind your child that he or she is responsible for reporting these signs and symptoms to the coach right away. Don't let embarrassment keep your child on the field. If dehydration is detected early, fluids and rest might be all that's needed. If your child seems confused or loses consciousness, seek emergency care.

Prevention is key

If your child plays sports in hot weather, encourage him or her to drink plenty of fluids before, during and after practices and games. Teach your child the signs and symptoms of dehydration, as well as the importance of speaking up if they occur. Involve your child's coach, too. Talk to the coach about adjusting the intensity of practice depending on the temperature and humidity on the field — and support the coach's decision to cancel games and practices when it's dangerously hot outside.

--Mayo Clinic