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Soccer Snacks

Get fruit back into the game

By ClubMom Meal Planning & Shortcuts and Healthy Eating Expert
[Liz Weiss and Janice Bissex](#)



*Liz Weiss, MS, RD, and Janice Newell Bissex, MS, RD, are authors of *The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers: Improving the Way Your Family Eats, One Meal at a Time!* (Broadway Books) and founders of the Meal Makeover Moms' Club. Together, they write the monthly column, "Smart Suppers," for Nick JR Family Magazine and contribute regularly to other publications including Babytalk and Better Homes and Gardens. Liz and Janice (AKA "The Meal Makeover Moms") conduct cooking classes and lectures for busy parents nationwide.*

[Learn more about Liz Weiss and Janice Bissex](#)

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Drive through any city or town on a weekend in the spring or fall, and you'll undoubtedly see every community sports field dotted with kids playing soccer, baseball, lacrosse, or football. Youth sports are on the rise — and so are the requests for parents to bring a "team snack" after the game.

All those snacks, however, may not be such a good thing. That's because some parents (perhaps at the request of their children) often bring junk food and sugary drinks instead of nutritious nibbles.

This alarming trend grabbed Liz's attention in the spring of 2004. So, she and her husband wrote a letter to the editor of their local newspaper. The letter sparked a very positive dialogue between parents and volunteer coaches, resulting in a fruit-and-water-only snack policy from the town's recreation department and soccer club. By the way, nearly 2,000 children participate in the town's youth soccer program, so the healthy-snack policy made a huge impact.

Here's the letter Liz and her husband sent to the *Lexington Minuteman*. Feel free to take this letter and customize it to meet your community's needs. It is amazing how one short letter brought such a positive change to the community:

Bring Back the Oranges—Please!

By Liz Weiss and Tim Carruthers

Five years ago, when our son was in kindergarten and played his first season of youth soccer, parents were asked to bring a snack each week. Back then, the snack was a half-time nibble of sliced oranges or some other type of fruit.

Today, that sideline snack scenario has changed — for the worse. Sure, the kids still get their apples and oranges, but after the game, many players have come to expect an après-game "reward" of junk food. The choices are many: Doritos, Oreos, Fruit Roll-ups, donuts, Rice Krispy treats, and Kool-Aid. Read the label on any of those foods and you'll see ingredients like partially hydrogenated vegetable oil (a fat that's converted into cholesterol-raising trans fats), sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, salt, and artificial colors and flavors.

Junk food is fine once in a while but, sadly, many kids eat it way too often. And on weekends when children bounce from soccer to baseball to softball, they end up devouring more high-calorie, nutritionally empty goodies than on any other day of the week. It just doesn't feel right to us. Many youngsters today are overweight and obese, while lots more are poorly nourished — eating nowhere near the recommended 5 to 7 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

We are writing this letter to urge every parent and coach in Lexington who participates in a youth sport to go back to the old days when fruit was the only thing parents brought to games (for a travel game, strive for fruit and a healthy after-game snack like a small bag of popcorn or an all-natural granola bar). If all of us agree to make that commitment, every child will benefit and no child will feel cheated when they don't get a bag of chips or cookies after a game. It's a small step, but an important one. Physical activity and good nutrition should go hand in hand, so let's all make it happen now.

The way we see it, kids are not born liking Doritos and Oreos. Eating habits are learned. This weekend, teach your children that all they need after an hour of soccer or an afternoon of baseball is a sweet snack of fresh fruit. Trust us. They'll gobble it up.

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