TEAM NUTRITION GUIDE

Gas Station & Truck Stop Fueling on the Road

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Hours spent on the bus are part of junior hockey life and the gas station or truck stop is often the only option between home and the opponent's rink. What you grab off the shelf at those stops directly affects your energy, recovery, focus, and how you feel in your next game or practice. This guide gives you a simple framework for making smart choices under pressure, without overthinking it in a 5-minute pit stop.

The goal on the road is the same as it is at home: carbohydrates to fuel your muscles and brain, enough protein to support recovery, fluids to stay hydrated, and avoiding things that cause energy crashes, GI distress, or poor sleep before or after competition.

The 3 Rules for Gas Station Fueling

1

Read the label, not the packaging.

A granola bar can be candy in disguise — check sugar and protein, not the picture on the wrapper.

2

Pair carbs with protein whenever you can.

A snack alone (like chips or candy) spikes and crashes energy; carbs + protein keep you steady for hours.

3

Hydrate on purpose.

Grabbing a drink because you're thirsty means you're already behind — build fluids into every stop, win or lose the taste test.

What to Buy: Smart Gas Station Choices

Realistic, widely available options that support performance and recovery.

BEST OVERALL PICKS

- String cheese or cheese sticks + a piece of fruit or a whole-grain snack
- Trail mix or nut/seed packs (watch portion size — these are calorie-dense)
- Beef jerky or turkey/chicken jerky (choose lower-sodium versions when available)
- Plain or lightly flavored Greek yogurt (if a cooler case is available)
- Hard-boiled eggs (increasingly available in convenience store coolers)
- Peanut butter or almond butter packets with pretzels, apple slices, or whole-grain crackers
- Bananas, apples, oranges, or other whole fruit
- Whole-grain or protein-fortified granola bars (look for 4g+ protein, less than 10g added sugar)
- Protein or meal-replacement bars (RXBAR, KIND Protein, Clif Builder's, etc.)
- Turkey or ham sandwiches / wraps if a hot-food or deli case is available
- Chocolate milk or a protein shake/RTD (ready-to-drink) — excellent post-game recovery option
- 100% fruit juice or fruit pouches in moderation, especially close to a game for quick carbs

BEST DRINK CHOICES

- Water — always the base of the order
- Electrolyte drinks (Gatorade, Powerade, LMNT, Liquid I.V.) especially after a game or in hot conditions
- Low-fat chocolate milk — one of the best recovery drinks available at any gas station
- Milk or a milk alternative (unsweetened)
- 100% juice in small/moderate portions

Bring a refillable bottle. Top it off at every single stop.

What to Avoid: Choices That Work Against You

These items are tempting and convenient, but tend to cause energy crashes, sluggishness, or GI upset before or during play:

- × **Energy drinks** (Red Bull, Monster, Bang, Celsius, etc.) — excess caffeine and stimulants hurt sleep, hydration, and heart rate regulation. Not appropriate for this age group around competition.
- × **Candy** (gummies, chocolate bars, sour candy) as a stand-alone snack — same crash issue, plus no protein or nutrients
- × **Chips and cheese-dust snacks** in large quantities — high sodium and fat with little nutritional payoff
- × **Anything brand-new or untested on a game day** — the day of a game or tournament is not the time to try a food you've never eaten before
- × **Large fountain sodas or slushies** — massive sugar spikes followed by an energy crash
- × **Fried gas station food** (taquitos, corn dogs, fried chicken sitting under heat lamps) — high fat and grease slows digestion and can cause stomach discomfort during play
- × **Pastries, donuts, and cinnamon rolls** — high sugar and fat, low staying power
- × **Skipping food/drink entirely** because 'nothing looks good' — under-fueling is worse than an imperfect choice; have a backup plan (see below)

Quick Reference: Good Choice vs. Bad Choice

GOOD CHOICES	CHOICES TO AVOID
✓ String cheese + banana	× Energy drinks
✓ Beef/turkey jerky	× Large fountain soda / slushie
✓ Trail mix (small handful)	× Candy as a meal replacement
✓ Peanut butter + pretzels	× Fried food under heat lamps
✓ Hard-boiled eggs	× Family-size bag of chips
✓ Protein/granola bar (low sugar)	× Donuts / pastries / cinnamon rolls
✓ Turkey sandwich or wrap	× New/untested foods on game day
✓ Chocolate milk or protein shake	× Skipping food or drink altogether
✓ Water / electrolyte drink	× Excess caffeine (multiple coffees/energy shots)
✓ 100% fruit juice (small size)	× Extra-large sugary iced coffee drinks

Timing Matters: Before vs. After the Game

On the Way To a Game or Practice

Favor easily digestible carbs with a small amount of protein. Avoid high-fat, high-fiber, or greasy foods within 2–3 hours of puck drop, since these sit heavy and can cause cramping or nausea during play.

Good: banana, granola bar, pretzels with a little peanut butter, small turkey sandwich, sports drink

Avoid: fried food, large sandwiches, heavy cheese, energy drinks, giant sugary drinks

On the Way HOME (Recovery Window)

This is the best time for protein and fluids to support muscle recovery. The 30–60 minutes after a game is a good window to prioritize.

Good: chocolate milk, protein shake, turkey sandwich, Greek yogurt, jerky + fruit, electrolyte drink

Avoid: only chips/candy with nothing else, skipping fluids entirely, energy drinks in place of real recovery food

BUILD-YOUR-OWN COMBO: A SIMPLE FORMULA

CARB + PROTEIN + FLUID

If you only remember one thing from this guide, remember this formula for any gas station stop.

CARB

fruit, granola bar, pretzels, bread/wrap

PROTEIN

jerky, cheese, nuts, yogurt, hard-boiled egg, protein shake

FLUID

water or an electrolyte drink alongside the snack

Tips for Staying Consistent on Long Trips

- Pack a small cooler bag with a few reliable options from home (fruit, jerky, protein bars) so you're never stuck with only bad options at a stop.
- Eat something at every stop on a long trip, even a small snack — long gaps without fuel lead to bigger crashes later.
- Bring a refillable water bottle and top it off at every stop — don't rely on remembering to buy water.
- Limit caffeine to normal amounts (like a small coffee) and avoid it within 4–6 hours of bedtime, especially the night before a game.
- If nothing on this list is available, prioritize the least-bad option: a lower-sugar drink and something with protein beats an all-candy, all-soda stop.