Energy Needs of the GROWING SWIMMER

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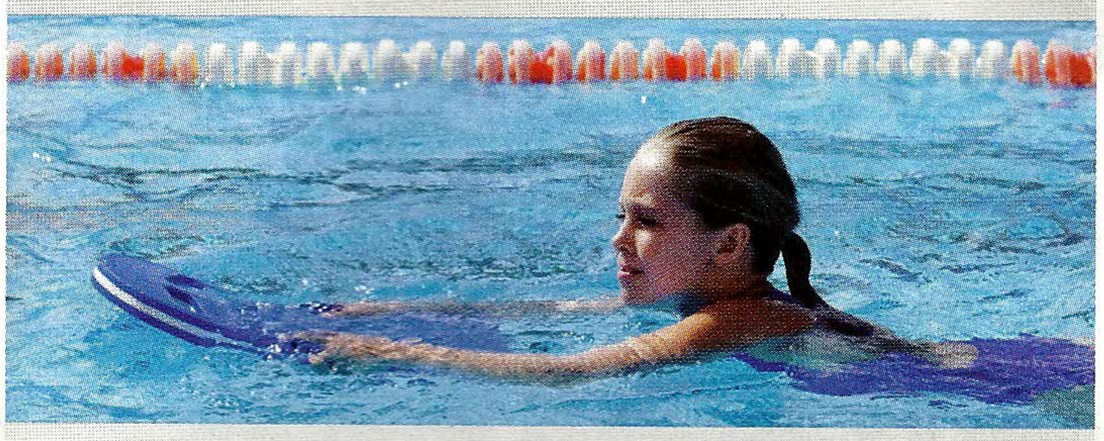

Calories provide the energy your young swimmer needs for everyday activity, swim performance and growth. But many parents struggle with the nagging question, "Exactly how much does my young swimmer need to eat?"

Children aged 9–13 years need about 1,500-2,400 calories each day, depending on age and gender, to support normal growth and development. Add the energy burn of a regular two-hour swim practice, and energy needs can skyrocket to 2,700 – 3,600 calories or more.

Martinez and colleagues (Journal of Strength & Conditioning Research 2011) recently found evidence that young, amateur swimmers had low energy consumption compared to what they needed.

As parents, it's our job to make sure kids get the energy they need, and from the proper food sources. Avoid reliance on the fast food drive-through and heavily processed foods. Not only can these foods be excessive in fat, salt and sugar, they also under-deliver important nutrients like iron, calcium and B vitamins. They also set the tone for future food cravings and selections that won't support good health when the swim team is over.

Here are some ways to assure your growing swimmer gets the right nutrition:

- **STOCK YOUR KITCHEN WITH GOOD QUALITY NUTRITION:** whole foods in their natural state, such as low fat dairy products, lean meats and other protein sources, vegetables, fruits, whole grains and healthy fats. These food groups should be a part of every healthy, growing child's diet.

- **MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD GETS THREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS.** No skipping! A meal should include at least 3-4 of the above food groups.

- **AIM FOR TWO SNACKS EACH DAY THAT INCLUDE A PROTEIN SOURCE.** Unsweetened cereal and milk; yogurt, fresh fruit and nuts; whole-wheat toast and peanut butter are all examples of a healthy protein-rich snack for your school-age swimmer.

- **TIMING IS EVERYTHING.** Kids perform best in all aspects of life when they eat regularly. Try to provide a meal or snack every 3-4 hours, and avoid sending your swimmer to practice on an empty stomach.

- **WITH SOME PLANNING,** it's easy to assure your young swimmer gets enough nutrition and is healthy, growing and energized for performing in the pool.