Veterans 35+: fuel for football

Daily eating

- Eatwell base; protein at every meal to help keep muscle
- Calcium and vitamin D for bone health
- Oily fish, fruit and veg for joints and heart health
- Watch portion sizes to match activity

Matchday plan

- Breakfast 3 hrs before
- Light snack 1 hr before
- Half-time/walking football breaks: water
- After: protein + carbs, stretch, sleep

Before	Normal meal 2-3 hrs before; light snack if needed.
During	Water at every break; thirst cues can lessen with age.
After	Protein + carbs within 1-2 hrs to aid recovery; rehydrate.
Hydration	Regular fluids; take care in heat, and with medicines that affect fluid balance (ask your GP).

Meal and snack ideas

- Salmon, potatoes and greens
- Greek yoghurt with berries
- Wholegrain toast and eggs
- Milk-based drink post-match

Note Bone/joint: get calcium and vitamin D (NHS suggests 10 mcg vitamin D daily in autumn/winter for adults). Recovery takes longer: protein spread through the day, sleep, and rest days. Check with a GP before changes if you have heart, kidney or other conditions.

Disclaimer

General guidance only, not medical or dietetic advice. Needs vary with age, growth, health, allergies and culture. For individual advice see a GP, registered dietitian or SENr-registered sports nutritionist. Under-18s: food first, no sports supplements or energy drinks; see a professional with any concerns.

Sources

NHS: The Eatwell Guide: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/
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England Football Learning: How to help young people eat well:
https://learn.englandfootball.com/articles-and-resources/welfare/resources/2024/How-to-help-young-people-eat-well
UEFA expert group statement on nutrition in elite football (BJSM, 2021): https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/55/8/416

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Veterans 35+: match-day plan and recipes

Guidance only, not medical advice. See a GP or registered dietitian for allergies, intolerances or medical conditions. Nutrition figures are rough estimates, not lab-tested. Always check food labels for allergens.

Match-day plan

Breakfast: Banana and cinnamon porridge (if kick-off is late morning, this is your pre-match meal)

3-4 hrs before: Red lentil bolognese

1-2 hrs before: Hummus, pitta and veg sticks. Small and familiar, nothing new on match day.

Half-time: Water; a banana or orange segments if hungry.

Within 1 hr after: Greek yoghurt, berries and oat crunch

Evening meal: Turkey and bean chilli with rice

Hydration: Regular fluids; take care in heat, and with medicines that affect fluid balance (ask your GP). Thirst can lag with age: drink to a plan, not just thirst. Go easy on alcohol after games.

NHS daily limits: No more than 6g salt and 30g free sugars a day.

Banana and cinnamon porridge

Breakfast | 8 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 50g porridge oats; 250ml semi-skimmed milk; 1 small banana, sliced; Pinch of ground cinnamon

1. Put oats and milk in a pan over a medium heat.
2. Stir for 4-5 minutes until thick and creamy.
3. Top with banana and cinnamon. No added sugar needed.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 480 kcal, 80g carbs, 17g protein, 10g fat, 0.3g salt.

Allergens: Cereals containing gluten (oats, unless certified gluten-free); Milk. Swaps: Dairy-free: fortified oat or soya drink. Gluten-free: certified gluten-free oats.

Cheesy beans on wholemeal toast

Breakfast or recovery | 8 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 200g reduced-sugar, reduced-salt baked beans; 2 slices wholemeal bread; 20g grated cheddar

1. Heat the beans in a pan or microwave until piping hot.
2. Toast the bread.
3. Pour beans over toast and sprinkle with cheese.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 490 kcal, 69g carbs, 25g protein, 10g fat, 2.2g salt.

Allergens: Cereals containing gluten; Milk; Check bean label (some contain celery or mustard). Swaps: Dairy-free: leave out the cheese. Vegan with dairy-free spread.

Red lentil bolognese

Pre-match meal (3-4 hrs before) | 30 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 70g dried red lentils, rinsed; 90g dried spaghetti; 200g chopped tomatoes; 1/2 onion and 1 carrot, finely chopped; 1 tsp olive oil; 1 tsp dried oregano

1. Soften onion and carrot in the oil for 5 minutes.
2. Add lentils, tomatoes, oregano and 200ml water. Simmer 20 minutes, stirring.
3. Cook the spaghetti, drain and top with the sauce.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 690 kcal, 115g carbs, 32g protein, 7g fat, 0.2g salt.

Allergens: Cereals containing gluten; Celery (if you add celery or stock). Swaps: Vegan as is. Gluten-free pasta. Mix half lentils, half lean mince if preferred.

Tuna and sweetcorn jacket potato

Pre-match meal (3-4 hrs before) | 10 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 1 medium potato (about 250g); 80g tinned tuna in spring water, drained; 2 tbsp sweetcorn; 1 tbsp light mayonnaise; Side salad (lettuce, cucumber)

1. Prick the potato. Microwave 7-9 minutes until soft (or bake 1 hour at 200C).
2. Mix tuna, sweetcorn and mayonnaise.
3. Split the potato, fill and serve with salad.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 490 kcal, 67g carbs, 30g protein, 10g fat, 0.8g salt.

Allergens: Fish; Eggs (mayonnaise); Mustard (check mayonnaise). Swaps: Veggie: reduced-salt baked beans or cottage cheese. Egg-free: plain yoghurt instead of mayonnaise.

Veterans 35+: recipes (continued)

Hummus, pitta and veg sticks

Snack (1-2 hrs before) | 5 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 2 tbsp reduced-fat hummus; 1/2 wholemeal pitta, cut into strips; 1 carrot and 1/4 cucumber, in sticks

1. Warm the pitta if you like.
2. Serve with hummus and the veg sticks.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 240 kcal, 32g carbs, 9g protein, 8g fat, 0.7g salt.

Allergens: Sesame (tahini); Cereals containing gluten. Swaps: Sesame allergy: tzatziki or bean dip instead. Gluten-free: rice cakes.

Greek yoghurt, berries and oat crunch

Recovery snack | 4 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 170g 0% fat Greek-style yoghurt; 80g berries; 25g granola or toasted oats

1. Layer yoghurt, berries and granola in a bowl or tub.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 330 kcal, 40g carbs, 23g protein, 6g fat, 0.2g salt.

Allergens: Milk; Cereals containing gluten; Tree nuts (check granola). Swaps: Dairy-free: soya yoghurt. Nut-free: plain toasted oats.

Baked salmon, sweet potato and green beans

Recovery meal (within 2 hrs after) | 30 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 1 salmon fillet (about 130g); 250g sweet potato, cut into wedges; 80g green beans; 1 tsp olive oil; Lemon wedge

1. Toss wedges in the oil. Roast at 200C for 25 minutes.
2. Add salmon to the tray for the last 12-15 minutes.
3. Boil or steam beans for 4 minutes. Serve with lemon.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 690 kcal, 63g carbs, 37g protein, 28g fat, 0.3g salt.

Allergens: Fish. Swaps: Swap salmon for mackerel, chicken or a bean burger. Oily fish once a week supports heart health (NHS).

Turkey and bean chilli with rice

Recovery meal (within 2 hrs after) | 35 min

Ingredients (1 standard portion): 120g lean turkey mince (5% fat); 120g kidney beans, drained; 200g chopped tomatoes; 1/2 onion and 1/2 pepper, chopped; 1 tsp mild chilli powder and 1 tsp cumin; 80g dried rice; 1 tsp oil

1. Brown the mince with onion and pepper in the oil.
2. Add spices, tomatoes and beans. Simmer 20 minutes.
3. Cook the rice and serve with the chilli.

Veterans 35+ portion: full to 1 1/4 of the recipe. Approx. (estimate) 750 kcal, 86g carbs, 55g protein, 14g fat, 0.5g salt.

Allergens: Celery and mustard (check spice mixes and stock). Swaps: Veggie: double beans or add lentils. Freezes well.

Recipe sources

NHS: The Eatwell Guide: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/
NHS: Salt in your diet (daily limits by age): https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/salt-nutrition/
NHS: Sugar, the facts (free sugar limits by age): https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/
NHS: Water, drinks and hydration: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/water-drinks-nutrition/
NHS Healthier Families: Healthier snacks: https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/healthier-snacks/
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