

Fitness and Nutrition

(From How to Referee Hockey: It is not just about the Rule Book)

The speed of hockey continues to increase with players at younger levels training harder, smarter and more efficiently than ever before. Referees, liners and officials need to be able to keep up with the play the entire game, so fitness and nutrition are very important to your development. In essence, this is the section that some will roll their eyes at and say, “I have heard this lecture in school before...”

But wait, there is more! Do you remember the four food groups? In 2019, the Government of Canada rewrote the Canadian Food Guide to be more straightforward, and the four food groups are no longer the central piece. Instead, the Canadian Food Guide says: half of all food should be fruit and vegetables, one-quarter should be protein, one-quarter should be grains, and water should be your main drink. A full discussion about nutrition is beyond the scope of this book, however, the Government of Canada has a full discussion on nutrition and recipes on their website.¹

This leads us to fitness. Again, organizations and governments set guidelines such as “Walk ten thousand steps per day”² and “Children and youth should get at least sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Adults, including seniors, should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week, in bouts of ten minutes or more.”³

These guidelines can be hard to meet unless you incorporate them into other parts of your life. It may mean using stairs rather than the elevator, taking walking breaks rather than sitting breaks or using the bus rather than the car (forcing you to walk to the bus ten minutes from your home). Fitness is not only determined by your time at the gym, but rather how you incorporate movement into your life. Effective fitness trainers can help you build muscle and endurance, but your ability to make movement a regular part of your day is the ultimate determining factor of your fitness.

Does refereeing, lining or officiating count as exercise? Most readers will automatically answer “Yes,” and they would be right. However, let’s look at the data. Between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 seasons, I used a FitBit to collect data while refereeing, lining and working the Two-Official System.⁴ Using the data collected, we can compare a person laying on a couch to a person officiating hockey. Given that the data for officiating was collected from a thirty-two-year-old male who is 5’11”, 180 pounds, the comparison will need to be for a male. When a man aged 19-30 sits on the couch for one hour, he burns about eighty calories. According to the FitBit data, a person burns 650 to 800 calories during a game with three periods of twenty minutes. Therefore, an official is burning 325 to 400 calories in one hour (three, twenty-minute

¹ <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

² <https://blog.fitbit.com/should-you-really-take-10000-steps-a-day/>

³ <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/tips-for-healthy-eating/physical-activity/>

⁴ Using a FitBit Charge2, I collected data on distance skated, steps, calories and exercise time for officials. See Appendix H for more information.

periods takes about two hours), which is a 5x increase compared to sitting on the couch (see Appendix H for more information).

So, refereeing, lining or officiating is definitely exercise, however, two important points need to be made. First, doing your job is not the strategy for being fit. You are a professional and need to be fit for hockey not because of hockey. Second, play other sports and do other things. Hockey Canada suggests hockey players find other activities in the summer,⁵ and the same can be said for those of us wearing stripes. Get outside, play (or officiate) a sport that requires different movements from skating. Enjoy nature. Find a balance. Treating summer as a time to be outside and away from the rink has many benefits for your physical fitness and mental health. If you live your life away from the rink in the summer, your abilities in September will thank you

Fitness in Refereeing Hockey: The Unsung Demands of the Game

(The following was created using Microsoft's Co-Pilot Artificial Intelligence software)

When fans think of hockey, they picture blistering slap shots, dazzling breakaways, and bone-rattling checks. Rarely do they consider the officials who keep the game flowing smoothly. Yet hockey referees face unique physical demands that rival those of the athletes they oversee. Fitness in refereeing hockey is not just a matter of endurance—it's a blend of agility, strength, and mental sharpness that ensures fairness and safety on the ice.

The Physical Demands of Officiating

Unlike players, referees don't get line changes. They are on the ice for the entire game, skating constantly to maintain optimal positioning. This requires:

- Cardiovascular endurance: Officials often cover five to six miles of skating in a single game, demanding strong aerobic capacity.
- Agility and acceleration: Quick pivots and bursts of speed are essential to keep up with fast transitions.
- Lower-body strength: Powerful legs support explosive skating and stability during collisions or sudden stops.
- Core stability: A strong core helps maintain balance and posture while skating at high speeds.

⁵ <https://activeforlife.com/hockey-canada-president-suggests-kids-take-a-break-from-hockey-this-summer/>

Mental Fitness and Focus

Physical conditioning is only half the battle. Referees must maintain sharp mental focus under pressure:

- Decision-making under fatigue: Calls must be accurate even in the final minutes of a grueling game.
- Stress management: Officials face criticism from players, coaches, and fans, requiring resilience and composure.
- Visual acuity: Tracking the puck, monitoring player behavior, and anticipating plays demand exceptional concentration.

Training for Success

Referees train much like athletes, with programs tailored to their unique role:

- On-ice conditioning: Interval skating drills mimic the stop-and-go nature of hockey.
- Strength training: Squats, lunges, and plyometrics build explosive power for quick transitions.
- Flexibility and mobility: Stretching and yoga reduce injury risk and improve skating mechanics.
- Off-ice cardio: Running, cycling, or rowing enhances endurance beyond the rink.

Nutrition and Recovery

Fueling the body properly is critical for peak performance:

- Balanced nutrition: Lean proteins, complex carbs, and hydration sustain energy throughout the game.
- Recovery protocols: Ice baths, massage, and adequate sleep help referees bounce back quickly between assignments.

Why Fitness Matters

A referee's fitness directly impacts the integrity of the game. Poor conditioning can lead to missed calls, slower positioning, and increased injury risk. Conversely, a well-conditioned official ensures the game is fair, safe, and played at its highest level.

In the end, refereeing hockey is a demanding profession that requires more than a whistle and a rulebook. It calls for athleticism, discipline, and resilience. The next time you watch a game, take a moment to appreciate the officials gliding effortlessly across the ice—they are athletes in their own right, keeping the sport honest and competitive.