Nutritional Knowledge Among Athletic Teams

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NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AMONG ATHLETIC TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of various athletes’ nutritional knowledge and evaluate the differences in this knowledge among NCAA Division II Athletic teams. The secondary purpose of this study was to gather the athletes’ opinion on how nutritional knowledge could be improved in the collegiate setting in order to gain a new perspective on how nutritional knowledge deficiencies could be improved for athletes.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have evaluated various aspects of nutritional knowledge in collegiate athletes; however, very few have actually evaluated the differences in this knowledge among athletic teams. One study that did compare knowledge between teams also evaluated other factors and concluded no differences were noted between teams; however, concluded that further research should be done in this area.

Numerous studies have evaluated the differences in nutritional knowledge between female and male athletes, and much of the research is controversial in this area. Many of the articles on this topic concluded that female athletes are generally more knowledgeable than males and male athletes, and much of the research is controversial in this area. Many of the articles indicated that athletes often do not consume adequate amounts of carbohydrates to fuel their athletic activities.

METHODS

The participants in this study were athletes enrolled in a Division II National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sport at Cedarville University. Both male and female athletes were evaluated from each different NCAA sport offered at Cedarville University. 100 total athletes participated in this study. The athletes were reviewed at the beginning of the spring semester and invited to participate in the survey. Each athlete was given a survey packet which included a consent form, demographic survey, and nutritional knowledge assessment portion of the survey which consisted of 21 multiple choice questions assessing nutritional knowledge. The following sports nutrition categories were included in the survey: macronutrients and performance, supplementation, weight management, and hydration. Another questions asked the athletes to rank their nutritional knowledge confidence on a scale of one to ten. Lastly, the survey concluded with 2 open ended questions. The first question evaluated where the participant received the majority of their nutritional knowledge. Lastly the athletes were asked to respond with their opinion on how they would choose to improve nutritional knowledge as a collegiate athlete.

RESULTS

For the qualitative question regarding where the majority of the athletes received their nutritional information from, 25% of the athletes indicated that school was the primary source; this was the most common answer. Twenty four percent indicated that online sources were their primary source. Other common responses included 19% indicating parents and friends as their primary source, 10% indicated personal experience, 10% replied personal research, 8% answered coaches, and 4% responded with athletic trainers. For the second qualitative question assessing their suggestions on improving nutritional knowledge among athletic teams the most common response was to provide classes specifically on the topic of sports nutrition and make the classes easily available for all athletes; 32% of the athletes offered this suggestion. Twenty-three percent of the athletes suggested that providing sources such as pamphlets or online resources would be beneficial in increasing nutritional knowledge. Eighteen percent of the athletes were doing personal research on their own through individual motivation was their suggestion. This was followed by 11% recommending professionals come and speak on the topic of nutrition, 10% suggesting that athletic teams be more purposeful in educating athletes, 5% indicating that coaches should increase nutrition awareness, and 2% suggesting that specific diet plans be created for individual athletes.

The survey contained demographic questions assessing the athlete the participated in as well as their gender. Demographic questions were followed by 21 multiple choice questions assessing nutritional knowledge. The following sports nutrition categories were included in the survey: macronutrients and performance, supplementation, weight management, and hydration. Another questions asked the athletes to rank their nutritional knowledge confidence on a scale of one to ten. Lastly, the survey concluded with 2 open ended questions. The first question evaluated where the participant received the majority of their nutritional knowledge. Lastly the athletes were asked to respond with their opinion on how they would choose to improve nutritional knowledge as a collegiate athlete.

DISCUSSION

When comparing these results to previous studies I found that similar results were found regarding male versus female knowledge. The majority of previous studies have either indicated that there was no difference between genders or that females performed higher than males. Regarding the differences between athletic teams, this study indicated that there was no difference overall; however, this may well be due to the limited external validity of the study. This study was very specific to the athletes attending this university. Other studies should be done at different locations and with larger population sizes to enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Also, further research is needed to improve nutritional knowledge among athletic teams. This study was able to demonstrate the importance of athletic trainers and coaches competence on the topic of sports nutrition. Many of the athletes indicated that they would seek advice from athletic trainers and coaches. Also many participants suggested that athletic trainers and coaches be more proactive about providing nutritional information and advice specifically for athletic teams. More effort should be done to improve nutritional knowledge among athletic teams. This can be done through providing classes, packets, speakers, online resources, weekly advice, and even creating diet plans. The results of this study should stimulate action to improve areas where deficiencies exist in athletic sports nutrition knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Sports nutrition is a significant and often overlooked aspect of athleticism and performance. Having a good knowledge base in sports nutrition has the potential to greatly improve performance as well as overall health. This specific research study has evaluated the differences in sports nutritional knowledge among athletic teams as well as gained suggestions from athletes on what they would do to improve the deficiencies in nutritional knowledge among collegiate athletes. This study can provide future guidance for coaches and other health care professionals as they seek to improve nutritional knowledge among various teams. The results from this study can stimulate action to address areas where nutritional knowledge deficiencies exists; whether it is a specific sport, gender, or nutritional category that has the greatest deficiency. Also the questionnaire has gathered recommendations and information on ways to improve nutritional knowledge among collegiate athletes from their own perspective.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS analysis with the priori alpha level being set as a value equal to or less than 0.05. Chi-square analysis was used to compare the results between genders and one-way ANOVA was used to compare the results between the various athletic teams. The qualitative data was evaluated for common themes and groupings.

PURPOSE

Nutraional Knowledge among Athletic Teams

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