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Knowledge, attitudes and practices on sports nutrition, body composition and associated factors among national level athletes in Sri Lanka

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Introduction & Objectives: This study evaluates the practices on sports nutrition, body composition and associated factors among national level athletes in Sri Lanka.

Method: Cross sectional study was carried out among 178 national level athletes aged 18-35 years representing karate, swimming, wrestling, volleyball, weight lifting (indoor) netball, rugby, track and field athletes (outdoor). Self-administered questionnaire obtained data on knowledge, attitude and practices on dietary pattern, hydration and supplements. Body composition (body mass index-BMI and body fat percentage) was determined using stadiometer, weighing scale and body impedance analyser.

Results: Practices were poor; consuming fast food (88.8%), missing meals (56.8%), improper meal timing (65.3%) and inadequate hydration during practices (73.8%). Majority (53.4%) had recommended BMI, however only 15.3% had recommended body fat. Majority (60.1%) had adequate overall knowledge on sports nutrition. Knowledge within subcategories varied, where most were of satisfactory knowledge with regard to dietary intake (59.6%) and supplements (55.6%), but not hydration (35.4%). Overall attitudes were positive (58.4%). Compared to outdoor sports, indoor sports significantly associated with improper timing of meals (indoor 65.6%, outdoor 40.6%; $p < 0.01$), missing meals (indoor 64%, outdoor 40%; $p < 0.01$), adequate hydration (indoor 66.3%, outdoor 84.3%; $p < 0.01$) and less supplement consumption (indoor 68.9%, outdoor 48%; $p < 0.01$). Compared to females, males had improper meal timing (males 62.7%, females 42.6%; $p < 0.05$), adequate hydration (males 32.1%, females 16.1%; $p < 0.05$) and recommended body fat percentage (males 19.4%, females 7.8%; $p < 0.05$). Less experienced athletes had adequate BMI (less 63.6%, more 44.4%; $p < 0.05$) but consumed more energy drinks (less 70.3%, more 38.8%; $p < 0.01$). Athletes with higher education level (47.3%) consumed supplements compared to lower educational level (32.3%; $p < 0.05$). Knowledge was not associated with any practices.

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