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An Evaluation of Food Provision to Jockeys in the Weigh Room at Irish Racecourses

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Abstract

Horse racing is a unique weight-making sport which requires jockeys to maintain a chronically low body weight throughout an extended racing season. These athletes typically eat one main meal per day when racing and often depend on racecourses for food provision. To date, racecourse catering provision to jockeys in Ireland has not been assessed. The aims of this study were to evaluate food provision at racecourses in Ireland, assess jockeys' satisfaction with current food provision and to explore key stakeholders' perceptions of current food provision. An audit tool was used to evaluate current food provision at 25 of the 26 Irish racecourses. The audit was scored out of 44.5 points and each racecourse was categorised as < 50% 'Requires nutritional guidance from a dietitian/sports nutritionist', 50–60% 'Bronze', 61–75% 'Silver', 76–90% 'Gold', > 90% 'Platinum'. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with jockeys (n = 125), racecourse managers (n = 2), racecourse catering managers (n = 2), and race day caterers (n = 1) to establish their perspectives on current food provision. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Audit scores ranged from 14.5–27.5. Based on their current food provision, nine racecourses were identified as 'Requiring nutritional guidance from a dietitian/sports nutritionist', 13 were categorized as 'Bronze' and two as 'Silver'. Grade 3 racecourses achieved significantly lower audit scores than Grade 1 and 2 racecourses. Jockeys' satisfaction ratings were positively associated with audit score. The main themes identified by jockeys included hot food, autonomy over food choices, and greater variety of foods. The main themes identified by managerial and catering staff were categorised under two domains, including perceptions of and factors influencing current provision, and barriers to and facilitators for improved provision. Support from a dietitian/sports nutritionist was identified in 22 of the 25 racecourses to improve food provision to support the needs of modern-day jockeys. Recommendations include development of minimum standards for weigh room food provision and basic training for catering staff on healthy, appetizing foods that are conducive to making weight. Guidelines endorsed by the Irish Horse Racing Regulatory Board (IHRB), Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) and the Irish Jockeys Association (IJA) should be developed and food provision at racecourses should be audited regularly. Achievable racecourse-specific interventions should be implemented to improve the provision of food and nutrient delivery to this athlete population.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest

[‡]The original version of this article was submitted with incorrect author information. A notice detailing this has been published and the error rectified in the online PDF and HTML copies.