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An investigation into nutritional knowledge of Irish rugby coaches

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Nutrition is an important factor for an athlete's overall performance and recovery. Previous research has demonstrated that sports nutrition knowledge is linked to balanced and healthy dietary practices^(1,2). As coaches have an influential relationship with athletes, in relation to their dietary intake, understanding the nutritional knowledge of coaches is necessary in terms of supporting an athlete's overall nutrition plan⁽³⁾. The aim of this study was to investigate the nutrition knowledge of rugby coaches within the Irish Rugby and Football Union (IRFU) responsible for coaching young players.

An online questionnaire was distributed by the IRFU via email to National and Provincial coaches (n = 54) of 15-20 year old male and female players. The questionnaire consisted of two previously validated general and sports nutrition knowledge questionnaires^(4,5). Ethical approval was provided by the ATU Sligo Department of Health and Nutritional Sciences Ethics Committee. Descriptive statistics were tabulated for coaches' demographic data and their total and sub-category mean scores. An Independent samples t-test assessed the difference in mean nutrition knowledge score for coaches who gave advice and those who did not give advice on sports nutrition.

Twenty-eight coaches participated in the study, yielding a response rate of 55%. Nearly two thirds of participants (64.1%) were within the age range of 29 – 39 years; the length of time coaching was relatively balanced with 25% having 2 – 5 years' experience, 35.7% had 5 – 15 years' experience and 39.3% had over 15 years coaching experience. Coaches responded correctly to over half of all the questions asked (55.3%), which is below the minimum score of 75% set to determine adequate nutrition knowledge⁽⁶⁾. There was no significant difference in nutrition knowledge score between coaches who reported having a formal nutrition training compared to coaches with no formal nutrition training. Fifty seven percent of coaches reported that they provided nutrition advice to their players.

In conclusion, the coaches that participated in this study did not have adequate nutrition knowledge. However, over half of the coaches reported giving nutrition advice to players, highlighting that coaches could benefit from a formal ongoing nutrition training program to improve their knowledge.

References

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