

Key Messages to Address Deregulation of Feeding Student Athletes

Summary

In 2012, nearly a half million student-athletes participated in college athletics across the U.S.¹ These students devote up to 20 hours a week to intense training and competition to contribute to a successful athletic program while striving to achieve a college degree.² Student-athletes have greater needs for fluids, energy and nutrition compared to the normal college student, as proper nutrition is essential to an athlete's ability to train and compete on the field and in the classroom.³⁻⁵ Yet, many student-athletes face making food choices and preparing meals for the first time in their lives and often skip meals or rely on poor quality convenience foods because they have neither the skills, time, nor funds to prepare wholesome meals.⁶ Just as technology has evolved to provide athletes with state-of-the-art equipment and training programs, nutrition science has evolved in the two decades since the NCAA issued its current feeding guidelines. Collegiate & Professional Sports Dietitians Association supports a rule that allows institutions to meet the responsibility to properly nourish their student-athletes to help ensure their health as well as their athletic and academic performance.⁷

Key Messages

- Proper nutrition is a requirement for student-athletes, not a perk. Universities have a fundamental responsibility for providing the best care and feeding of their athletes.
 - It is about the right foods at the right time.
- Institutions should determine how to best nourish their student-athletes to help support their health as well as their athletic and academic performance.
 - Leading health organizations such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the Dietitians of Canada and the American College of Sports Medicine agree that fitness and recovery can be enhanced by proper nutrition before, during and after training.³
- Our collective professional experience has found that access to nutrient-rich foods throughout the day can help athletes fuel and restore, while reducing reliance on supplements and avoiding the binge-eating and back-loading of calories frequently associated with a once-a-day training table.⁶
 - For example, research indicates that milk is an effective tool to help athletes refuel, recover and rehydrate from intense training.⁸
 - At about 20 cents a glass, milk is an easy, cost-effective way to provide high-quality protein to help rebuild muscle and reduce muscle breakdown; carbohydrates to help refuel muscles; fluid and electrolytes to rehydrate and replenish what is lost in sweat after intense training; and vitamins and minerals to help build and maintain strong bones and support overall health.^{8,9}
- Less than 3% of college athletes, on average, will compete professionally.¹⁰ As they give their all for the program's performance, we must give our all for their academic performance.
 - Access to nutrient-rich foods throughout the day can help provide the nutrition student-athletes need to help them focus and concentrate on their studies, as well-nourished students are more likely to do better in the classroom.¹¹⁻¹⁴
- Training tables are learning labs that can help student-athletes develop good eating habits that will serve them now and after their playing days are over. Training tables also have a far-reaching impact;

the knowledge and behaviors acquired at the training tables will serve generations to come, as these players go on to become parents and coaches.

- With more than 700 active sports dietitians and more than 3,750 scientific papers on sports nutrition published since the current NCAA regulations were issued in 1991, there is a large knowledge base and a growing number of trained and experienced sports-nutrition professionals who can deliver a high quality training-table experience in terms of both nutrition and education.
- Just as exercise science and technology has evolved to provide athletes with state-of-the-art equipment, nutrition science has evolved in the two decades since the NCAA issued its current feeding guidelines. We owe it to our athletes to support their dedication to their sport and their academic life with evidence-based best practices in nutrition.

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