

DIETARY INTAKES AND EATING HABITS OF ELITE ATHLETES IN SERBIA: ARE THEY FOLLOW THE CURRENT SPORTS NUTRITION STANDARDS?

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Abstract Objective: Adequate nutrition has been recognized as very important factor for good health, conditioning and performance in athletes. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to assess dietary intakes and eating habits of elite Serbian athletes and to compare them with the sports nutrition standards.

Participants: Data were obtained from 58 male athletes between January 2011 and January 2012. Sixteen were soccer players, 12 were basketball players, 13 were kayakers, 8 were judokas and 9 were wrestlers. Participants completed anthropometric measurements and dietary intake, energy expenditure, energy balance, carbohydrate, protein, fat, water, vitamins and minerals were recorded.

Results: Mean energy and carbohydrate intakes were below recommended values, with 34.5 % of the participants meeting their energy needs. Seventy-two percent of the participants failed to consume the minimum amount of carbohydrates that is required to support training. Fat intake (expressed as % of total calorie intake) of the kayakers was higher than recommended, while the mean protein intake of all participants was within the optimal range (1.2-2.0 g/kg). The water intake of the soccer and basketball players was lower than the recommended one for their activity level. All the groups of athletes had adequate dietary intake of iron, magnesium, vitamin C and vitamin B12. Only kayakers consumed adequate amount of calcium. Intake of fibres, vitamin B6, vitamin A and vitamin E for all the groups was below the recommended values. All the groups of athletes showed an excess of sodium and insufficient consumption of potassium.

Conclusions: The results of the present study demonstrated that the majority of athletes do not have a good nutritional status for the intake of carbohydrates, fibres, vitamin B6, vitamin A, vitamin E and potassium. It is therefore suggested that effective nutrition interventions measures, including educational programs on proper food selection and eating habits, are needed to improve the nutritional status of the athletes.