

Practical nutrition recommendations for the elite female athlete – How to approach what's the same and what's different for the elite male athlete

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Over the past decade, attention has been called to the under-representation of female athletes in sports nutrition research. Indeed, although many expert groups encourage athletes and coaches to choose sports nutrition practices that are evidence-based, audits of sex-balance in research identify that female participants are under-represented across all areas of sports science research, with the theme of greatest imbalance being interventions for performance optimisation. Furthermore, studies that have involved elite (Tier 4 and 5 athletes according to the McKay tiering system) are even more rare. Nevertheless, sports nutrition practitioners must prepare elite athletes for competition using a pragmatic approach that makes the best of our current knowledge. This session will provide an update on our success in raising awareness of the need to undertake female specific research, and programs and resources which have been developed to accelerate the process. It will provide advice on strategies to work through special needs for elite female athletes based on 1. Understanding special characteristics of their event; 2. Opportunities to scale nutrient recommendations to differences in body mass or muscle mass; 3. Special nutrients at risk in female athletes; 4. Current evidence of different responses due to menstrual status/phase and 5. Cultural, social or psychological relationships with food. Continual updates on progress that is being made to enhance sports nutrition knowledge for female athletes will hopefully serve to encourage future endeavours as well as quickly disseminate the emerging knowledge.