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Fueling Strategies, Dietary Habits, and Sources of Nutrition Information of Collegiate Cheerleaders

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Presenter Information

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Fueling Strategies, Dietary Habits, and Sources of Nutrition Information of Collegiate Cheerleaders

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Understanding the nutritional knowledge and food choices of collegiate athletes is important to ensure each athlete is receiving adequate fuel to sustain a high level of physical activity. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the snacking habits of the Louisiana Tech University cheerleading team. Participants were surveyed to assess their baseline knowledge of nutritious snacking and confidence in their ability to make nutritious meal choices. Participants included forty men and women on the Louisiana Tech University cheerleading team between the ages of 18 and 23. An 11-item survey was given to assess the participants understanding of pre and post workout fueling and their current habits. Of the sample, 58% felt comfortable making healthy dietary choices when dining away from home, 53% felt confident choosing healthy options when grocery shopping, 45% felt that they do not have adequate time to prepare healthy foods, 50% felt that they knew how to make healthy food choices but made unhealthy choices regardless, and 60% believed that their nutritional needs as an athlete differed from those of the average college student. Over half of the participants, 75%, consumed 2 or more snacks per day, with mean snack consumption being 2.3 snacks per day. Also, 70% stated that they altered their snacking habits based on physical activity level. All participants confirmed that they were physically active at least one day per week and indicated that a typical workout session lasted from 31 to 90 minutes. The majority of participants, 88%, indicated that they received nutritional information from popular media sources, friends and family, or coaches, with only 12% indicating that they consulted a registered dietitian or other healthcare provider for dietary guidance. College athletes have additional nutrition needs due to increased physical activity level and may not be receiving appropriate nutrition education from reputable sources. Future educational programs should focus on teaching collegiate athletes the benefits of consulting registered dietitians for nutritional information rather than popular social media sources. In addition, it would be advantageous for athletes to have a tool that can guide them to reputable sources such as MyPlate and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics when seeking nutritional guidelines.