

TALKING TO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES ABOUT FOOD & NUTRITION: A NEW APPROACH

What is Diet-Culture?

Diet-Culture puts foods into categories of “good” and “bad,” praises certain body types, and can unintentionally encourage athletes to not eat enough for their sports performance.



Anti-Diet Culture focuses on things like enjoying sports, properly fueling your body, and celebrating athletic success of bodies of all size.

Diet Culture in Sports Harms Youth Athletes

Diet culture leads to decreased participation in physical activity, weight-based bullying and disordered eating behaviors. By age thirteen, **70% of athletes will drop out of sports¹**.



Sports Participation Matters

Youth sport participation improves athlete’s mental and physical health, thinking, emotional regulation, social connectedness and academic achievement^{2,3}.



Coaches Have An Influence

Coaches play a large role in youth body image development and nutrition⁴. A coach’s thoughts on body weight influence the nutrition recommendations they give to athletes. Coach training in nutrition can help improve athletes’ nutrition knowledge⁵.



1. Foley Davelaar CM. Body image and its role in physical activity: A systematic review. Cureus. 2021;13(2):e13379. doi:10.7759/cureus.13379
2. Eime RM, Young JA, Harvey JT, Charity MJ, Payne WR. A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act. 2013;10:98. doi:10.1186/1479-5868-10-98
3. Merkel DL. Youth sport: positive and negative impact on young athletes. Open Access J Sports Med. 2013;4:151-160. doi:10.2147/OAJSM.S33556
4. Couture S, Lamarche B, Morissette E, et al. Evaluation of sports nutrition knowledge and recommendations among high school coaches. Int J Sport Nutr Exerc Metab. 2015;25(4):326-334. doi:10.1123/ijsnem.2014-0195
5. Sung J-Y, Lee J-H, Lee K-L. Analysis of the diet, weight-loss behavior, and nutritional knowledge of athletes and coaches in weightclass sports: influence of a coach’s nutritional knowledge on athletes. J Int Soc Sports Nutr. 2024;21(1):2405159. doi:10.1080/15502783.2024.2405159

11 HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS COACHES WERE INTERVIEWED, HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID!

Coaches Want to Help!

"I feel like, so coming from a coach standpoint, I would want my athletic director to offer me opportunities. And I don't know if that's something that like the VPA or anything would be able to help spread out and then offer to coaches."

11 out of 11 coaches shared a strong desire for more education and resources.



What Coaches Are Saying

Coaches want to help their athletes **identify foods that fuel their bodies!**

"And I do genuinely make a point to as silly as it sounds to try to police them a little bit. And... my first year was awful. It was, I was like, oh my god, stop buying Skittles guys. And then I started harping on it a little bit a little bit more, a little bit more."

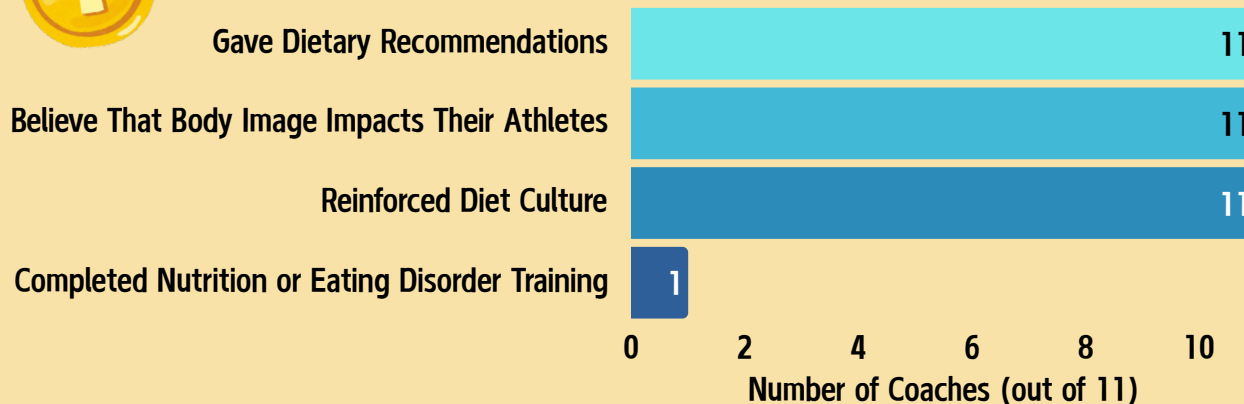
"Whatever is a good fuel for you."

"I tend not to tell them not to eat things... I think... quantifying good and bad is not always a positive thing and not my role..."

However, most coaches are **reinforcing diet culture**, by putting foods into "good" and "bad" categories.



Survey Results



What You Can Do Next!



Read: [USA Triathlon: Six Things to Avoid When Talking to Athletes About Sports Nutrition](#)



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Explore: [Weight Inclusive Nutrition Research Group Website](#)



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Read: [Fat Talk- Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture by Virginia Sole-Smith](#)