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Assessment of nutritional knowledge and food skills in talented adolescent athletes

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Sarah Jane Burkhart

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adolescent athletes**

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Abstract

There is very limited research on the nutrition knowledge and food skills of elite athletes in New Zealand. Adolescent athletes are moving through an important physiological stage of life, as well as training and competing in their chosen sports. These athletes are the future New Zealand sporting representatives and therefore need adequate nutrition knowledge for performance, as well as health and wellbeing. This research investigated the basic and sports nutrition knowledge of 100 talented adolescent athletes, aged 13 – 20 years from five team sports using a questionnaire and a focus group. The focus group involved 9 rugby players and investigated currently available nutrition resources. While the participants had a reasonable level of basic nutrition knowledge, their sports nutrition knowledge was not as high. They struggled with the concepts of sports drinks, muscle growth and supplements. Most participants had received some nutrition education and indicated that in the future they would prefer individual sessions with a sports nutritionist, written resources, as well as group sessions including cooking sessions and group workshops, and using a high profile athlete as a role model. The participants were very clear that their coaches and parents needed to be involved in their nutrition education. More research is needed to assess the overall knowledge of New Zealand adolescent athletes and the most appropriate, and effective methods of education for this group.

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