

Title: Professional Athletes and Weight Management: A Needs Assessment

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Abstract

Because weight and nutrition largely affect professional athletes' performance, athletes may be interested in using specific diets to assist with weight management. However, little is known about what diets are currently being practiced by professional athletes for weight management and how sports dietitians are counseling these athletes. The purpose of this study was to discover what is currently being seen and practiced in the field of sports nutrition when professional athletes are using specific diets to assist with weight management. Using a mixed methods approach, 29 sports dietitians who work with professional athletes were surveyed, and a player in the National Football League who had followed a specific diet for weight loss was interviewed. The survey and interview questions were developed to measure methods professional athletes are using for weight management, resources sports dietitians are utilizing when counseling professional athletes on specific diets, what sports dietitians feel is missing from these resources, and professional athletes' experiences while following specific diets for weight management. Descriptive statistics were run to detect frequencies of the different variables for all items. Results demonstrated professional athletes are interested in and/or are using specific diet methods for weight management. However, the resources sports dietitians are using to counsel these athletes do not contain enough sport-specific information pertaining to the diet, lack accuracy, and need more extensive information. Thus, there is a need for a resource that provides

guidance to sports dietitians and athletes on how to safely and effectively implement specific diets at the professional level.