



A COMPARISON OF EATING HABITS OF MARTIAL ARTS ATHLETES REPRESENTING UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA AND SRI LANKA ARMY

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Abstract

Dietary intake and eating habits significantly influence the performance of athletes. This cross-sectional survey aimed to compare the eating habits of martial arts athletes representing University of Sri Jayewardenepura and Sri Lanka (SL) Army. The sample included 30 university athletes (male: 15, female: 15) and 43 SL Army athletes (male: 28; female: 15) aged between 20-32 years. Participants were briefed about the study procedure and explained that their agreement to participate was completely voluntary. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The eating habits of participants were recorded using a pre-validated questionnaire during normal training days (from November to December 2020). Chi-Square test was used to determine the associations between the athlete groups and eating habits. Majority of Army athletes (91%) and university athletes (57%) consumed 5-6 L of water per day for 5-7 days per week. Majority of SL Army athletes (74%) and university athletes (63%) reported consuming vegetables 5-7 days per week. However, only 30% of Army athletes and 40% of university athletes consumed fruits 5-7 days per week. Regarding unhealthy food habits, 2% of Army athletes and 37% of university athletes reported consuming carbonated beverages 5-7 days per week whereas 5% of Army athletes and 37% of university athletes consumed fast foods 5-7 days per week. Significant associations ($P<0.05$) were found between athlete groups and eating habits such as consumption of fruits, vegetables, starchy foods, protein-rich foods, dairy products, sweets, carbonated beverages, and fast food. Based on Food-based dietary guidelines for Sri Lankans, it can be concluded that SL Army athletes show healthier food habits compared to university athletes. Both groups should increase the consumption of fruits. University athletes must minimize unhealthy food habits such as frequent consumption of carbonated beverages, fast foods and sweets while increasing water consumption.

Keywords: *Eating habits, martial arts athletes, fruits and vegetables, fast food*