Diet and nutrition

The Olympic training camps held in Tallahassee, Florida, in the summers of 1994 and 1995 provided an opportunity to formulate a rehydration, nutrition, and acclimatisation strategy for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. The 1994 camp was used to begin educating athletes about the heat and humidity that they might expect to experience in Atlanta in 1996, the effect these conditions might have on performance, and the steps they might take to limit these effects. Building on the experiences of 1994, the camp the following year developed strategies for specific sports and individuals for 1996. At these camps the sports dieticians and nutritionists had proactive roles, but at the 1996 camp in Tallahassee before the Games and at the Games themselves this role became a more reactive one.

1994 Olympic training camps

Two multisport camps were held in Tallahassee during 31 May–17 June and 13–28 July 1994. Three sports dieticians/nutritionists appointed by the British Olympic Association (BOA) attended the first camp and two the second camp. Each was allocated to work with specific squads throughout each camp. This was determined by a number of factors, including the length of stay of each squad, the number of athletes in each squad, the actual time required to meet the demands of each squad, and the previous experiences that the sports dieticians/nutritionists had of working with specific squads.

The work was undertaken in a variety of ways:
- Presenting at multidisciplinary lectures to the whole camp on acclimatisation
- Running group seminars and workshops with individual squads
- Undertaking individual dietary counselling
- Undertaking individual dietary analysis using the Comcard dietary programme
- Monitoring weight loss and fluid intake at training sessions
- Developing a food labelling system in the dining room based on the system used at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic games.

Athletes were encouraged to weigh themselves every morning, before and after training sessions and to monitor their urinating habits (volume, frequency, colour). This self-monitoring gave athletes the opportunity to appreciate the effect the climatic conditions were having on hydration status. Lectures, seminars, and workshops were used to discuss these findings and to highlight the need to develop strategies for specific sports and individuals. Athletes selected for Atlanta would need to know what to drink, when to drink, and how much to drink. The camp also provided an opportunity for athletes to experiment with PowerAde, the official sports drink of the 1996 Olympic Games. (PowerAde is not available in Great Britain.)

Lessons learnt from the 1994 camps

The contribution to the total energy intake made by drinking large volumes of PowerAde can be considerable and this had serious implications, particularly for sports with several weight categories. For other sports, however, the contribution to total carbohydrate intake made by PowerAde was beneficial. For many athletes water had been the drink they had chosen in Great Britain during training sessions and athletes had to be shown the benefits of using a drink containing carbohydrate and sodium to minimise dehydration, particularly when large fluid losses through sweating were experienced. Athletes needed to be encouraged to maintain adequate fluid intakes once they became acclimatised. From this camp the key issue to be addressed at the 1995 camp was the need to develop specific rehydration strategies for specific sports and individuals.

1995 Olympic training camp

A multisport camp was held between 28 July and 15 August 1995. Three BOA appointed sports dieticians/nutritionists attended the camp. The service was operated on a similar basis to the camp the previous year. Before the camp, many of the sports were visited by their designated sports dietitian/nutritionist at a Great Britain training weekend. This gave an opportunity to present the BOA acclimatisation strategy and to introduce the diets that had been developed for recording fluid intake, body weight, urine volume, frequency, colour, etc. Athletes were encouraged to collect data at home so that normal patterns at home could be compared with the same data collected at the training camp in Tallahassee.

The use of the diary was beneficial. Many athletes had filled in diaries for a number of weeks before the camp. The comparison of this baseline date with data generated during the camps, and the osmolality tests carried out by the exercise physiologists, enabled the sports dieticians/nutritionists to provide extremely detailed feedback to the athletes individually. The most successful feedback to sports occurred where the squad had been visited before attending camp.

1996 Tallahassee camp (1–31 July)

The three sports dieticians/nutritionists who attended this camp were not allocated to specific sports, as in previous years, but were experienced and equipped to work across the range of sports at the camp. The service offered was primarily one of problem solving, but providing reassurance and confidence building were also seen as an integral part of the service. Before the camp it had been agreed by the BOA Nutrition Steering Group that the nutrition service would be low profile and that intervention would only occur when it was requested by a team manager, athlete, or coach. Such crisis management might have involved a weight problem—for example, loss of weight due to loss of appetite or not being on target to "make weight". In the event no major problems needed nutritional intervention.

Valuable lessons were learnt over the three years as the acclimatisation strategy was developed. It is hoped that this information can be put to good use by those preparing teams for the next Commonwealth games in Kuala Lumpur where climatic conditions will be just as hostile as Atlanta—if not worse.

JANE GRIFFIN
Diet and nutrition.

J Griffin

Br J Sports Med 1997 31: 78
doi: 10.1136/bjsm.31.1.78

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/31/1/78.citation

These include:

Email alerting service
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/