DIETARY HABITS AMONG YOUNG TRIATHLONISTS
AS A RESULT OF PROECOLOGICAL STYLE OF LIFE –
PRELIMINARY STUDY

Zbigniew Szygula¹(A,D,E), Karolina Kazimierczak²(B,D), Edward Golec³(D,E), Małgorzata Schlegel-Zawadzka²(A,C,D,E,F,G)

¹Department of Sports Medicine, University School of Physical Education, Kraków, Poland
²Department of Human Nutrition, Institute of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Kraków, Poland
³Faculty of Physiotherapy, University School of Physical Education, Kraków, Independent Public Health Care Centre, 5th Military Clinical Hospital with Policlinic, Department of Traumatic Surgery and Orthopaedics, Kraków, Poland

Abstract

Introduction: Strenuous physical activity during the preparatory training period raises an issue of attention that is being paid to the young athlete's body. The literature published thus far, has mainly focused on specific exercise sports, such as swimming, cycling, and running that influence an athlete's overall health and physical performance. However, not only does the exercise training influence the physical condition and health of an athlete, but a proper, balanced diet plays an equally important role in the athlete's healthy physical condition.

The aim of this study was to recognize dietary habits among young triathletes.

Material and methods: Nine triathletes, aged 15-18 years (6 boys and 3 girls), and 9 non-training youth in the same sex and age group category, participated in the study. The data was collected by administering a questionnaire.

Results: The results collected in this study showed that triathletes lead a more ecological lifestyle in comparison with the population not engaged in triathlon training. The triathletes tended to consume a more balanced diet.

Conclusion: Promoting triathlon as pro-ecological discipline may aid in raising social awareness of maintaining proper physical activity and nutrition diet in the population.

Keywords: youth, triathlon, ecological sport, dietary habits

Introduction

Strenuous physical activity during the (preparatory) training period raises an issue of attention that is being paid to the young athlete's body. The literature published thus far, has mainly focused on specific exercise sports, such as swimming, cycling, and running that influence an athlete's overall health and physical performance. However, not only does the exercise training influence the physical condition and health of an athlete, but a proper, balanced diet plays an equally important role in the athlete's performance.

During preparation of his or her training plan, an athlete, in cooperation with his or her personal coach and a physician, needs to design an adequate diet that would consist of supplements and nutrients.

A triathlon is an Olympic, athletics competition which combines three disciplines – swimming, cycling, and running. Athletes need to be properly prepared for all three events. At the present time, a limited body of scientific literature focuses on this issue, and virtually no studies on Polish triathletes have been carried thus far.

Therefore, an aim of this study was to recognize dietary habits among young Polish triathletes.
deviation. The differences between tested groups were assessed by non-parametric test - Manna-Whitney. The R Spearman correlation coefficient was a tool of similarity evaluation of food frequency intake in A and C groups. The level of significant differences was alpha=0.05.

Results
The data collected during this study allowed the authors to conclude that triathlons lead a more ecological life style in comparison with the population who does not engage in triathlon training. The athletes tended to eat a more balanced diet, which might be a result of a nutritional, athlete’s coach, and a physician counseling.

In order to improve their performance, thriatlonists consume a variety of nutritional supplements. Triathlons showed a tendency to most frequently ingest energizers (89%), substance building nutriments (52%), multivitamin-minerals supplements (78%), and isotonic liquids (67%).

The subjects in the study tended to show different reasons for engaging in physical activity: among athletes, this group maintained a physical activity (67%) and remained healthy and fit (44% each), while non-athletes showed a physical fitness (67%) and health level (27%) (Tab. 1).

The majority of the subjects consumed four meals (50%) and five meals (28%) during the day. 33% of athletes declared to have a special diet.

The most commonly consumed beverage/fluid among athletes was mineral water (3.89±0.33). The athletes consumed significantly higher doses of fluids in comparison with the non-athletes (3.33±0.50; \( P=0.0188 \)). Intake of gaseous beverages was also diagnosed in both groups. According to collected data, subjects in group C drank much more gaseous beverages than those in group A (\( P=0.0156 \)). Other beverages, such as coffee, tea, herbal tea, fruit juices, milk, energizers, and beer, were consumed in the similar manner in both groups (Tab. 2).

The consumption of 27 types of food products was examined (Tab. 3). The comparison of food frequency intake by both groups was calculated. The significant differences were found in fruits, sweets and chips consumption. Thriatlonists ate fruits more frequently (A: 5.44±0.73, C: 3.67±1.12, \( P=0.0035 \)) and less frequently sweets (A: 3.22±1.20, C: 4.67±1.66, \( P=0.0393 \) as well as potato chips (A: 1.67±0.71, 3.78±1.66, \( P=0.0076 \)). The calculated R Spearman correlation coefficient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Cause of physical effort. (Scale: 1- no, 2- yes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parameter</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Silhouette</td>
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<td>Professionally</td>
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N–number of persons, X±SD – arithmetic mean ± standard deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Number and frequency of drinking liquids daily by study groups (Scale: 1-never; 2- occasionally; 3- 1-2 glasses; 4- 3-5 glasses)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parameter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mineral water p=0.0188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaseous beverages p=0.0156</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herbal tea</td>
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<td>Fruit juices</td>
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<td>Milk</td>
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<td>Energizers</td>
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<td>Beer</td>
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N–number of persons, X±SD – arithmetic mean+standard deviation
comparing similarity of frequency consumption of 27 food products in each group was statistically insignificant (R. Spearman = 0.29, P>0.05). This means that in total, the selected products were consumed in different amounts in both groups.

**Discussion**

Ecological training is the main postulate of triathlon as a sports discipline (clean forests, lakes, and rivers). Strain during the preparatory training enforces extra care of athletes' body – especially one's joints in legs. The overall environment, ie., the ground on which triathletes run, the water they swim in, and the air they breathe in, are all very important for maintaining a good health. Air pollution can negatively affect the athlete's health, which furthermore may play a role in their sports performance.

Thus far, the conducted study only examined the influence of each singular triathlon sports discipline on the total result that sportsman gains in the triathlon participation (1). They checked the dehydration during the longest triathlon distance which is "Ironman", but none of them evaluated the way of sportsmen nourishment during triathlon.

Aside from designing a proper training plan, an athlete, in cooperation with his or her coach and his or her physician, should focus on an adequate diet (2, 3).

The evidence collected during the study allowed the authors to state that triathletes lead more ecological
mode of life than the people that do not train triathlon. The diet evaluated in sportsmen, tended to be more balanced, which might be the effect of consultations with the coach, physician and nutritionist. In order to improve their performance during training and competition, triathletes intake various types of nutrients and supplements.

Beneficial results were also noted after comparing the fluid intake during the day in both groups. Mineral water was a most frequently used drink among triathletes. This may be the result of the athletes’ awareness of the value of proper hydration during the day (4-7). The results gained on researchers own investigation material lead to beneficial results – triathletes tented to point to fruits and vegetables as the most frequently ingested by them products. Additionally, cereal and milk products, fat meat products, and sweets placed on the lowest position.

A variety of elements play into one’s lifestyle. One of the most commonly used elements we can enumerate way of nutrition, way of coping with stress, relationship building at work, or relaxing.

The topic of nutrition poses a serious concern in Poland. The study shows a strong link between the poor nutrition and poor quality of lifestyle in Poland.

A study conducted by Wlodarczyk shows that 86% of Polish population does not recognize the relation-ship between their health problems and attention one pays to his or her health (8).

Physical activity plays a very important role in health promotion. This study also shows that triathletes lead a more healthy lifestyle than individuals not engaged in exercise training.

A strong connection between frame of mind, pro-per psychophysical development and the life-style one exists. Unhealthy nutrition and low value food intake are one of the most common reasons of serious disorders and diseases. Adequate and rational nutritional diet promotes good health and helps to prevent various disorders, such as obesity, hypertension, caries, and large intestine cancer. Since no earlier scientific literature and data regarding this type of study exists, more research on this topic is necessary to confirm the importance of our research study results.

The above study shows that promoting triathlon as pro-ecological discipline may aid in raising social awareness of maintaining proper physical activity and nutrition diet in the population. It is important to educate coaches specializing in various sport disciplines about the importance of proper nutrition diet in young athletes since these educators will be able to raise this awareness in their athletes.

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References


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Address for correspondence:
Zbigniew Szygula
University School of Physical Education
P.O. Box 62
31-571 Krakow
Poland
Tel. +48 12 6831223
email: wszygula@cyf-kr.edu.pl

Edward Golec: bgolec@poczta.onet.pl
Małgorzata Schlegel-Zawadzka: mfzawadz@cyfronet.krakow.pl

Authors’ contribution
A – Study Design
B – Data Collection
C – Statistical Analysis
D – Data Interpretation
E – Manuscript Preparation
F – Literature Search
G – Funds Collection