

Careers for Dietitians in Sports Nutrition

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I graduated from Deakin University in 1996 and travelled overseas for 4 years, working as a clinical dietitian in various locations of the UK in between travels around the UK and Europe. When I returned to Melbourne in 2000, I set up a private practice and started to pursue the specialities of sports nutrition and eating disorders. I have always worked in at least several different locations and enjoy the variety that this has offered. For the past 10 years I have further specialised within sports nutrition to work with athletes whose sporting performance has a specific weight, body shape or body composition component. I currently work with elite level gymnasts, ballet dancers and jockeys within sports nutrition. Additionally, I continue to work within the field of eating disorders, specialising in group-based therapy for bulimia and binge eating disorder.

Interview

What does a dietitian do working in sports nutrition?

A sports dietitian works with a team or individuals with the shared goal of optimising sporting performance. This can vary widely depending on the sport and the individual attributes of each athlete. Sports dietitians are expected to be experts in such topics such as hydration, recovery, optimising body composition and eating to compete as well as being up to date with the latest research in the area of sports nutrition. You may do lectures or nutrition education with groups of athletes and also meet with individuals to assist with specific nutritional needs. Being able to do body composition (skinfolding) and hydration testing are also often part of the job.

Where does a dietitian work in sports nutrition?

Sports dietitians can work in a variety of settings, from private practice to sporting clubs where you may not only work with the athletes but also with coaches and other members of the health team.

What experience and qualifications do you need to work in sports nutrition?

To be a sports dietitian, you need to have completed a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics as well as an additional sports nutrition component of study (either as a postgraduate course or at the Australian Institute of Sport).

What are the highlights?

I think this is different for everyone, but for me, I enjoy the variety of working with different types of athletes. The sports I work with encourages me to think “outside the box” and come up with creative, individualised plans for athletes that are specific to their needs. I also really enjoy working with the challenge of attempting to meet the energy needs of athletic teenagers!

Advice for students who are interested in working in sports nutrition?

Get along to the local Sports Dietitians Australia (SDA) meetings (held bi-monthly).
Keep up to date with research in sports nutrition.
Offer to help dietitians already working in the field.