Development of a Nutrition App for Student Athletes

Based on reviews on current nutrition research regarding collegiate athletes, there is a lack of knowledge, inconsistent information for healthy eating, and poor eating habits. There is a need for resources which are currently not easily attainable at the Division 3 level. Access to nutrition research has a positive impact on an athlete's overall health and performance. The objective of this study is to assess whether college athletes are interested in having access to a mobile app with nutrition and health information and what types of information they desire.

Methods:
The previous research team held focus groups with participants from the Student Athlete Advisory Council to understand both the general nutritional behaviors of student athletes, and if they would like a nutrition app. Based on the information gathered from the focus groups, a questionnaire was developed to examine the informational needs of athletes. A 16-item questionnaire regarding scheduling and type of nutrition and healthy living questions with responses ranging from 1 to 5 (extremely interested to not interested at all) was sent to and answered by 130 student athletes. Qualtrics was used to deliver the questionnaire regarding the needs for content, display and devices. To determine what possible technological limitations might exist and to determine what features would be reasonable, consultation with the computer science department is being done. The nutritional information and recipe suggestions (in addition to other desired features) are now being communicated to the computer science consult team and imported into a prototype app in a format that would be easily accessed and navigated by IC athletes.

Results:
Based on our analysis of questionnaire data, student athletes reported wanting specific features that focused on providing recommended meals and snacks based on calorie intake and types of exercise/training. The features that received the most interest were setting up personal nutrition goals, receiving recipes with nutritional values, meal preparation recipe ideas, high carbohydrate snack selections, high protein snack selections, nutrition advice for in vs. out of season athletes, and calorie calculator based on activity level. Therefore, these features will ideally be formatted and inputted into the mobile app. Athletes were not interested in the following ideas for app development: sleep tracker, hydration tracker, promotional features, pairing the app across tracking, and a competition reminder. Currently, the research team is compiling and organizing nutritional research and suggestions from the literature to provide accurate and helpful nutritional advice for student athletes.

The mobile app is now being developed to be used by IC student athletes with information to promote better decision making when it comes to their nutrition.

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