

How do high-protein processed foods affect athletes' and exercisers knowledge and attitudes towards protein?

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INTRODUCTION

Protein is essential for athletes and exercisers for muscle repair, recovery, and performance (Jäger et al., 2017). However, concerns arise about over-reliance on processed sources (Trexler et al., 2019). Limited research exists on how high-protein processed foods affect athletes' understanding attitudes towards protein needs and sources.

Previous studies suggest people consume high protein foods without monitoring frequency and recommend guidelines (Ortega et al, 2024). However, these studies have not been conducted in the UK, highlighting a gap in understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Four subjects participated, two male and two female, aged 18-80, recruited through sports clubs, gyms, and personal networks. Data collection included semi-structured interviews conducted in person with audio recording using Microsoft teams. All interviews were transcribed. Data analysis included a thematic analysis of transcripts identifying key themes using NVivo.

KEY FINDINGS

Understanding of Protein

Most participants (75%) associated protein with muscle repair but had limited knowledge of specific dietary requirements.

Attitudes Towards Protein

75% viewed high-protein processed foods as useful and convenient but all noted at least one concern i.e ingredients.

Influences on Consumption

Food choices are driven by taste, routine, convenience, and cost. Half (50%) of participants noted cost as a significant factor.

Role of Physical Activity

Active individuals (50%) showed greater nutritional awareness and informed choices, less active (50%) expressed uncertainty about protein needs, showing confusion.

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They make it look more appealing, like high protein – so I probably would go for that. – P3

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DISCUSSION

Results indicate high-protein processed foods influence attitudes and understanding of protein. Physically active participants show slightly better nutritional awareness, but this is often driven by habit and product labelling than deep understanding (Jagim et al., 2025).

While these foods are seen as convenient and beneficial after exercise, concerns about taste, price, and artificiality remain (Forsyth & Mantzioris, 2023).

High-protein processed foods encourage convenient protein options but may also promote naive or uncritical conceptions of protein requirements, emphasizing the need for targeted nutrition education to help athletes optimize performance and health through a better understanding of protein requirements (Jagim et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Although high-protein processed foods are thought to be convenient and helpful for recuperation, this study shows that there is a substantial knowledge gap regarding protein requirements, underscoring the need for improved nutrition education to help athletes and exercisers make well-informed decisions.



References

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