



# Nutrition information sources of female athletes at a girls' sports club in Kuwait: An exploratory study of sources, usefulness, accessibility, and obstacles

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## KEYWORDS

Information behaviors;  
Athletes;  
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**Abstract** The purpose of this study was to explore the nutrition information sources used by female athletes in the Girls Sports Club in the State of Kuwait. A survey method using a questionnaire was employed. The questionnaire was distributed by coaches of each sport team. All of the players, who are trained and officially registered to compete nationally, were requested to participate in the study. Using anonymously completed questionnaires, 49 players from seven unique sports provided data.

Findings showed that although athletes were aware of the benefits of "human" sources of information, they preferred "material" sources due to accessibility and availability. The athletes relied on independent learning from websites and print publications rather than the professional advice available from nutritionists and medical doctors.

This study provides new information about current, important issues in nutrition information sources that are poorly understood. The information in this study should be used as the basis for an education program to improve players' nutrition knowledge and awareness.

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## Introduction

Nutrition is "the science of food, the nutrients and the substances therein, their action, interaction, and balance in relation to health and disease" (The Center for Health Promotion, 2006). Nutrition plays a significant role in the human lifecycle (Al-Hamahma, 2000). In its proper quality and

quantity, a healthy balanced diet provides the human body with the needed nutrients. However, to gain a broader understanding of nutrition's effect on individuals, it is necessary to understand the information behaviors and preferences reflected by individuals in different roles. This knowledge could assist in improving behaviors, and changing negative preferences, which in turns affects the overall role of nutrition.

The library and information science (LIS) literature has reflected a change towards examining user behaviors rather than focusing on systems. This shift from a system orientation to a user orientation has stimulated several attempts to model human information behavior and generate theories that would explain human information behavior in-depth and stimulate further research. However, researchers have faced difficulties

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in modeling human information behavior due to the complex nature of the behaviors, and the difficulty of generalizing a single model to encompass all human information behavior.

Therefore, exploratory studies of different groups, by occupation, role, and demographic group, continue to remain a necessary tool towards gaining a clearer understanding of the information preferences and behaviors of different groups in an attempt to affect these preferences and behaviors positively using models, theories, practical solutions, training, education, and other effective interventions.

One such group that has not been examined previously in Kuwait is female athletes. Nutrition plays a significant role in sports and by using various strategies, the nutritional state of athletes can be enhanced to improve performance overall. One aspect of these multiple strategies includes information behaviors, as effective information behaviors would assist in improving the overall state of the athlete.

Understanding nutrition guidelines is essential in seeking and using nutrition information. Therefore, this study aimed to gain an understanding of the information behaviors and preferences of female athletes towards information sources, to lay the foundation for future research that could assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses, and to affect positively the overall nutritional practices of female athletes.

## Review of related literature

Over the past century, human information behaviors have been examined by researchers from different fields in an attempt to gain an understanding of these behaviors, and the ramifications that come with them. Researchers in various fields (sociology, psychology, LIS, computer science, and others) have studied aspects of human information behavior in a variety of settings.

Over the years, the focus of LIS research has shifted from system-centered studies, such as library usage (e.g., Broadus, 1980; Drone, 1984) and information retrieval systems (e.g., Bookstein & Cooper, 1976; Cawkell, 1975), to user-centered studies, such as the roles of professionals (e.g., Leckie, Pettigrew, & Sylvain, 1996) and how these affect information behaviors. User-oriented studies did not gain popularity until the 1960s, when researchers started examining information needs and uses of scientists (Menzel, 1966). These studies examined scientists' preferences and evaluations of information sources and channels, information use, and information dissemination.

Nutrition plays a key role in health and life, and the way we search and use nutrition information is significant. Educating athletes nutritionally can have positive effects on exercise and competition. A good dietary practice is important for athletes in order to reach an optimal level that will aid them to compete effectively and efficiently. Studies have been conducted regarding nutrition information sources of the general public. The literature reviewed below covers nutrition information sources used by athletes and the usefulness of these sources.

Athletes are concerned about the importance of food in health and disease prevention. It is the obligation of nutrition professionals to provide a simple, accurate, and fair nutrition information and education. Nutrition information communication, which often appears to be complex and confusing,

is an evolving field (Tontisrin & Bhattacharjee, 2002). Understanding fundamental nutrition principles, combined with good dietary practice, is essential.

Buttriss (1997) conducted an in-depth study in the United Kingdom (UK) to assess nutrition information adoption. Respondents adopted health recommendations about nutrition and macronutrients, such as fat. The majority of the respondents (80%) were well-informed about healthy foods. Energy providing nutrients such as starch gained less interest than fat and sugar, which had received more media attention and were perceived negatively by respondents.

Abbott (1997) tested nutrition sources in the UK and focused on the use of food labels and nutrition information sources. Respondents wanted detailed, yet simple, nutrition information on food labels. Nutrition information on food labels usually affected purchasing decisions. The majority of respondents (82%) looked at food labels and read nutrition information on a regular basis.

The media has been a significant resource for nutrition information (Abbott, 1997), with television, newspapers and magazines identified as the most used nutrition information sources. In Buttriss' (1997) study, 57 percent of participants indicated that they received the major part of the nutrition information from television and radio programs. However, few of the participants (15%) found these programs useful. The frequency of use of nutrition information from magazines and newspapers came after television. Participants indicated that they frequently used schools, parents, television, and food labels as sources of their nutrition information. These studies reported that general medical practitioners were indicated as a good source of nutrition information; however, participants lacked the motivation to seek advice from health professionals (Abbott; Buttriss).

Nutrition information sources in Germany were studied by Dillen, Hiddink, Koelen, De Graaf, and Woerkum (2004). Nutrition centers, education offices of the food sector, dieticians, as well as family doctors were often sought as sources of information. Furthermore, because of its increased usage and availability, the Internet was perceived as a significant source of nutrition information because information was available when needed. Nutrition information from the media was hardly mentioned.

Some studies have indicated that gender was an important factor in seeking and using nutrition information. In general, women were more involved and educated about health issues (Abbott, 1997; Buttriss, 1997). Unlike males, females were more likely to use the nutrition information from food labels (Abbott). However, Conkle and Tishler (1992) found that the nutrition information seeking behaviors of males and females did not significantly differ and respondents considered themselves well informed about nutrition. Burke (2001) tested gender variation in information seeking and noticed that there were not significant differences between males and females in their information preferences. However, the researcher found that females received more information than males.

There are few studies on nutrition information sources sought. There is no known study conducted in the Arabian Gulf region regarding female athletes' nutrition information sources. There is a need to conduct such a study in order to gain a better understanding of their preferences and behaviors, and recommend positive interventions to improve the overall situation. Such study could stimulate

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