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Barriers to Exercise and Nutrition for Special Olympics Athletes

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**Introduction**

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<th>Problem</th>
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<td>• People with intellectual disability (ID) have higher rates of obesity.</td>
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<td>• Special Olympics Vermont (SOVT) athletes compete in sports events throughout the year.</td>
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<td>• Athletes may lose fitness between seasons.</td>
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<td>• Their nutrition habits remain unknown.</td>
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<td>• Barriers to exercise and nutrition remain unknown.</td>
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<th>Goal</th>
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<td>• We were tasked with designing a successful exercise and nutrition program for SOVT athletes.</td>
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**Methods**

To make recommendations on how to design a successful exercise and nutrition program for SOVT athletes, we needed data on:

- Habits
- Awareness
- Barriers
- Motivating factors

**Solution**

- We conducted an interview-based survey of 59 SOVT athletes.
- Participants were ≥18 years old and recruited at a statewide soccer tournament.
- IRB-approved protocol required verbal consent.
- BMI was calculated from height and weight.

**Results**

- **Age (yr) BMI**
  - Females (n=23) 31 ± 8 30 ± 8
  - Males (n=36) 27 ± 8 27 ± 5

  "Eating healthy makes me who I am."
  - Special Olympics Vermont athlete

**Discussion**

- **Limitations** include small sample size and selection bias.
- Even in our sample of soccer athletes, 70% had BMIs that fell within the overweight or obese ranges.
- **Lifestyle interventions** should be based upon reported barriers and strengths—not county income or population size, which did not correlate with BMI.

**Recommendations**

**SOVT Program**

- Inclusion
- Family
- Team
- Accessibility
- Home
- Information
- Lifestyle changes
- Simple modifications
- Motivation

**Future Research**

- Inclusion
- Community
- Accessibility
- Transportation
- Motivation

*"If SOVT developed a plan, would you want to try it?"
97% Yes!

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