

Practical Solutions

Effects of a Nutrition Education Program on the Food Awareness and Health Literacy in Participants of a Next-Generation Athlete Development Project

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ABSTRACT

【Aim】

We conducted a nutrition education program for upper-grade elementary school children participating in a Next-Generation Athlete Development Project, with the aim of improving their food awareness, eating behaviors, and health literacy, and verified the effectiveness of the program.

【Methods】

The first program was an outdoor cooking practice, where each group created its own menu and cooked according to it. The second program was a lecture to educate the children on the importance of the diet and the effects of foods on the body and exercise performance. In addition, they were given notebooks with instructions to record their daily habits and their daily activities throughout the educational period (from October of fifth grade to March of sixth grade). The notebooks were collected once a month, and the person in charge of the dietary education program returned them with comments each time.

【Results】

At the end of the program, the participants showed improvements in their nutritional knowledge and their awareness of the importance of eating a variety of foods as compared to the baseline as well as in comparison with the knowledge/awareness of other children in the same grade. In terms of health literacy, the participants showed a greater ability to observe themselves objectively and acquire knowledge. These findings suggest that the implementation of sports activities, regular self-observation, and feedback can enhance these abilities.

【Future Challenges】

No significant changes were observed in the actual eating behaviors, suggesting that the eating environments at home and school also have a considerable impact. Since junior high school students gradually become more independent in their eating habits, the effect of nutrition education in that age group needs to be investigated further.

Keywords: next-generation athletes, nutrition education, health literacy