

Sports And Performance Nutrition

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Lecture-24: Travel guidelines for athletes

Hi everyone, elite athletes have to endure intense travelling schedules. In this lecture of high performance module, let's understand the travel needs of athletes, the food choices to challenges from regular outstation visits for tournaments to international air travel and addressing certain accommodation challenges. A professional athlete has a high need of food intake from a professional player to a recreational athlete. If one focuses on physical activity, you can relate to what his nutritional needs must be. Even heading out to a gym requires you to carry a food kit, be it a banana or a protein supplement. An athlete who has multiple training sessions a day has to also cater to the same food kit with additional food or a few meals through the day.

So you can imagine what it must be for an athlete who has frequent travel for matches. Even just going from city to city can be overwhelming process. This added stress is in addition to the sports performance anxiety which the athlete is already enduring. It is not uncommon for competitive athletes to travel by flights even to reach cities and states within India.

A few of the athletes I am supporting are often travelling across Europe, Asia to compete. Also sometimes the farther an athlete has to travel, they are faced with the challenge of changing time zones. This obviously leads to a disturbance of the day and night cycle. Even with a few of my athletes who recently represented India at the Asian Games in China, even a few hours of change can disturb their daily rhythm. And with the cabin pressure and the dry air of an airplane with longer flight duration, there is a challenge of dehydration especially when athletes do not take care to drink adequate water.

With international tournaments and air travel, the athlete faces the challenge of adjusting to the local time and sometimes this can lower their performance. Not having the comfort of your home and the warmth of your cozy bed itself can compromise a good night's rest. So even with day to day travel for multiple matches, the athlete's sleep cycle can be disturbed. So you can imagine that if the athlete is travelling outside of India, it takes the body a few days to adjust and get into the rhythm of deep sleep. If the athlete is already compromised from a high training load, this frequent travel can add an additional strain on the immune function of the athlete which can make him very susceptible to infection.

Typically in my practice, I often see athletes catching common cold, fever, upper respiratory tract infection. So how can an athlete make amends to settle down faster? By planning the food intake, an athlete can lower the symptoms of jet lag. If you remember, eating a carbohydrate rich meal increases serotonin. Similarly meals with high protein intake which is rich in good quality protein offers an essential amino acid tryptophan and tryptophan can also increase serotonin and it is advisable for athletes to always consume a meal at the local time

of the destination. So choosing balanced meals including carbohydrate proteins and eating at the local time can help.

What are the other ways an athlete can help adjust to time zone change? There are also certain other ways an athlete can acclimate to the local time. Sunlight is a very powerful tool which can influence the athlete's sleep cycle. Exposure to early morning sun rays increases serotonin and you will wonder it has a direct influence on the quality of sleep. Similarly, an athlete can stay active in the day and thereby ensuring some exposure to daylight which can help the athlete adjust to that time zone. It is not surprising that little time spent on planning and researching can go a long way in helping the athlete for the tournament.

Understanding the local culture and the cuisine perhaps even knowing one or two sentences of the local language can really work in your favor. It is also highly recommended an athlete does pay attention to the weather conditions. Being prepared for the right attire and the gear to be prepared for a rainy day will never go waste. It is also a good protocol to plan your accommodation. Is the flight and accommodation taken care by the federation if you are an elite international athlete representing the country or do you have to make your own arrangements? What are the budgets allowed for it? Today we have several accommodation options from a hotel to Airbnb.

Does the facility have food service or do you have to plan to carry additional grocery? Does the accommodation have a restaurant or is there a grocery store close by where you can pick up some fresh produce or will the athlete village support your dining needs? Planning for these basic needs ahead can help you a lot of time. To reinforce the same guideline even when traveling its best athletes stick to the tried and tested strategy of familiar foods. A bit of planning and carrying some convenient options can save you the agony especially if you are in a new vicinity and are left in lurch. It is also always good to prep a travel kit and have a grocery list. For an athlete to stay in the pink of health is the utmost priority when traveling especially for a competition.

I have known of cases where athletes have had viral fevers, gastrointestinal disorders with uncontrolled diarrhea or vomiting and the tournament has been called off. That can be very disheartening for an athlete and there are ways you can some way avoid this situation from cropping up. By ensuring of a basic food safety protocol consuming only cooked foods avoiding raw or fresh juices to undercooked non-vegetarian foods its best to stick to a hot piping meal which can be void of bacteria. Also a common practice I notice among athletes is sharing cutlery, sharing water bottles which can be an unnecessary source of bacterial or viral infection. If the athlete has a low immunity they can succumb to an infection.

So for each of the athlete who is travelling for tournament keep in mind these simple practices can be a stitch in time saving 9. Another important aspect that can help a travelling athlete is to arrive to the destination a few days earlier. That way the athlete can acclimate to the local weather conditions which can give him or her some time to adjust to the hot environment or the humidity. This can also help an athlete adjust and adapt to the hydration strategy to prepare better for a tournament. Athletes who also travel to destinations at high altitude can be faced with dehydration because the air is thin and sparse they may not be able to consume meals due to lower appetite or feel very sluggish and irritable because of the lack of sleep.

In this situation an athlete can consume small frequent and lighter meals to ease digestion ensuring consuming hot fluids or liquids with some electrolytes as salt can also help hydration. For a travelling athlete with disturbed sleep melatonin can be a support particularly if they are having challenges of disturbed sleep. If the athlete is already under the weather and is apprehensive of the travel need based nutritional supplements can be very helpful to uphold the immune status and this should be done in discussion with a qualified dietician or a sports physician. With the travel and not necessarily only taking a flight sometimes you just exhausted just sitting in a vehicle to reach from one destination to the other. So this travel fatigue can also impose disturbances in sleep.

So when it's utmost needed a professional can give you the right direction and the optimal dose to use melatonin and this should be used briefly only for the duration of your travel. Ensuring adequate intake of water can prevent the headaches typically seen in travel. Planning a grocery list and carrying some items with you is always an advantage. It's always a good idea to have a plan B option where you have a few ready to eat items in case of an emergency. Carrying a few nonperishable food items such as our typical dry fruit or dates laddu or puffed rice laddu or chivda from even roasted snacks as peanuts or nuts is a good option where an athlete can grab a quick bite.

Keeping a few fresh fruits as apple or oranges or guavas which are easy to carry and will last for about a week is also an ideal option when travelling. So to summarise athletes in competitive cycle should research and plan ahead in time. If you travel outside of India acclimate to local time by arriving a few days earlier. Stick to familiar food options which is cooked and a few ready to eat simple healthy snacks for travel. Adapt to the food timing and sleep as per the local destination time.

I hope these tips were useful to you in some way. Thank you for listening.

Hello everyone, I am Subut. I am a Karnataka under 19 state badminton player. Travelling and tournaments can be very demanding for an athlete.

I find carrying some familiar comfort foods like oats, protein bars, almonds and supplements highly beneficial especially when driving to new cities. In some remote places there is no access to grocery stores near by the venue or the hotel. So in such cases it is imperative to carry some basic needs of your food from home. So I take most important care for the food sanitation and hygiene. I never eat street food and I use only water drinking water so that I avoid gastrointestinal infections and gut issues.