

# Food Choice Motives in Student Athletes in the North East of England

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## Introduction

Athletes’ food choices impact fuelling for and recovery from sporting performance, as well as supporting health outcomes. Athletes’ environments, social influences, personal beliefs, preferences and skills also contribute to food choices (1). There may be times when a suboptimal food choice is convenient and economical for an athlete (2). Food choice therefore can be a complex and challenging process, especially when an athlete is training multiple times per day, often at differing venues. These issues are ubiquitous and are often driven by sport specific demands such as aesthetics, weight making behaviours or high training volumes (4).

## Methods

30 athletes (22 male, 8 female), from team (*n* 20) and individual (*n* 10) sports completed the Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ), rating items on a 1 – 7 Likert scale (extremely unimportant to extremely important). The FCQ divides food choice motives into 9 sub-categories (Health, Mood, Convenience, Sensory Appeal, Natural Content, Price, Weight Control, Familiarity & Ethical Concern). Ratings for each sub-category were calculated for each athlete and analysed using a customised spreadsheet (3). Influence of gender and sport played (individual or team) were analysed as independent covariates. Differences reported as effect sizes ± 90% Confidence Intervals with accompanying descriptors: Trivial 0-0.2; Small 0.2-0.5; Moderate 0.6-1.1; Large 1.2-1.9.

## Results

Sub-category	Sport	Descriptor	Gender	Descriptor
Health	-0.06 ± 0.83	Trivial	-0.24 ± 0.99	Small
Mood	0.69 ± 0.77	Moderate	0.19 ± 0.89	Trivial
Convenience	0.43 ± 0.74	Small	-0.08 ± 0.90	Trivial
Sensory Appeal	1.27 ± 0.79	Large	0.00 ± 0.90	Trivial
Natural Content	-0.26 ± 0.78	Small	-0.04 ± 0.93	Trivial
Price	0.26 ± 0.78	Small	-0.25 ± 0.88	Small
Weight Control	-0.61 ± 0.85	Moderate	-0.26 ± 1.11	Small
Familiarity	1.07 ± 0.70	Moderate	0.02 ± 0.81	Trivial
Ethical concern	0.18 ± 0.79	Trivial	-0.19 ± 0.93	Trivial

## Practical Implications

Sport played (individual or team) demonstrated a greater influence across a greater number of food choice motives (ES: Small to Large), than athletes’ gender (Trivial to Small). Our data support the notion that food choice and related behaviours occur largely independent of gender, across a breadth of sports (4). Nutrition education in this age group should be placed in the context of a sport, and demonstrate consideration for gender specific factors. Large confidence intervals confirm that, despite our findings, food choice is primarily an individual and complex exercise.

## Take Home Message



Sport played may impact food choice motives to a greater extent than athletes’ gender

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