

Healthy food and drink choices in sport

AFL Victoria's 'I am a Healthy Choices Coach' initiative



As a part of VicHealth's State Sport Program, AFL Victoria's 'I am a Healthy Choices Coach' initiative aimed to enable Junior AFL coaches to lead their players and club communities towards healthy food and drink choices. AFL Victoria partnered with nutrition experts, Nutrition Melbourne, to develop an education module for their junior coaches' course based on the Victorian Government's Healthy Choice guidelines.

AFL Victoria Development Managers were trained to deliver the education module, which was presented at 21 Junior Level One Coach Education courses, attended by a total of 1271 coaches. The module was designed to:

- increase understanding of the nutrition and hydration requirements of junior footballers
- increase the confidence among coaches to advise young footballers on best nutrition practices.

This was backed up by simple messaging, fact sheets, two videos, and newsletters.

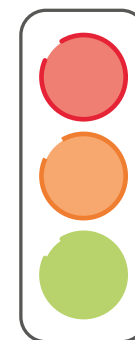
Impact of the 'I am a Healthy Choices Coach' initiative



Surveys pre- and post-workshop indicated increased coach knowledge and confidence. At the end of the season, some of the improvements in knowledge and self-efficacy levels were maintained, but some were closer to baseline levels, demonstrating the importance of having regular reinforcement or continuous support available. (Based on 2016 results.)



The module will continue to be delivered in a range of formats in the future, both online and face to face; and also as part of the AFL's National Coach Education strategy.



The education module used the Victorian Government's *Healthy choices: food and drink guidelines* traffic light system to classify foods and beverages.

- Red:** Limit intake
- Amber:** Choose carefully
- Green:** Best choice

Short, easy to understand messages were key to success of the initiative:



The 'I am a Healthy Choices Coach' message, designed to both educate and give coaches credibility, was supplied as a sticker for magnetic coach boards.



The nutrition fact sheet contained easy to remember advice, such as: Refuel, Repair, Rehydrate.



The hydration fact sheet opened with a simple but effective message: 'Water is the clear winner for hydration in football'.

“
Rather than sharing a bag of 'snakes' with the kids, the players have a piece of fruit and are continuing to do so regularly after their games for the remainder of the year.”

– Rowan Brittain, Caulfield Bears U10 Polars coach, who has seen the impact of the education on his practices

Challenges encountered

- Low level of nutritional knowledge among coaches at the start
- Initially finding a nutrition expert to assist in developing resources
- Incorporating the training into a crowded coach education curriculum
- Time spent training the trainers
- Time spent following up on the surveys of coaches

“
A key element was... [making] a strong focus on water as the drink of choice rather than sports and soft drinks for the junior footballers.”

– Steve Teakel, Coaching Development Manager, AFL Victoria

Recommendations for sports organisations educating coaches about healthy food and drink choices



Communicate simple, easy to remember messages.



Reinforce key messages throughout the season to boost confidence and commitment.



Encourage behavioural changes that are easy to implement, such as choose water.



Engage expert nutrition advice in the early stages.



Carry out surveys to determine levels of knowledge and self-efficacy before, during and after the initiative.



Support coach credibility with fact sheets, videos and newsletters.

The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires all public organisations in Victoria to facilitate an environment and culture where healthy choices are easy choices for all Victorians.

For more resources and information about how to support sport organisations to create welcoming and healthy environments, including healthy food and drink choices, visit: <https://vicsport.com.au/healthy-welcoming-sport>

For more information and resources about other organisations making the healthy choice the easy choice, visit: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/easychoice

For more information and support with implementing The Victorian Government's Healthy Choices guidelines in sport and recreation centres, visit: www.heas.health.vic.gov.au/healthy-choices/sport-and-recreation-centres-and-parks

