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Title

Weight Cutting in Combat Sports – from Science to Practice

Abstract

Weight cutting is a term used among combat sports athletes for weight loss before competition in order to qualify to lower weight category. Athletes declare that they are cutting weight to gain advantage over smaller and weaker opponent.

There are two voices in combat sports nutrition world about the weight cutting before competition. One of them is to ban it - because of the negative health consequences of rapid weight loss. The second one is about the importance of weight cutting for the competing athletes as a focus and self-control aspect of competition preparation. The main problem of this conflict is the difficulty in drawing a strict borderline between safe and risky weight cutting. Athletes combine the weight loss methods to achieve faster results. Clustering them into pre-competition weight loss models in Olympic taekwondo helped to determine that 20% of taekwondo athletes have high risk of developing negative health outcomes during or after weight loss. These athletes use "dehydration" model for weight cutting and should be the main recipient of educational programs and dietitians help in weight management.

There are several steps to assess the potential risk of weight loss among athletes. These steps are helpful in developing personalized weight management plan. Weight cutting should be avoided in poor nutritional status and the athlete in that situation should start in higher weight category.

Key references

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Key messages

Our role as dietitians is to educate combat sports athletes, coaches and parents of young athletes about the health consequences of improper weight loss before competition.

Pre-competition weight loss should be planned in long term basis to protect health and performance of the athletes.