

“Eat Less, Run Faster” - Ailish Chambers

“Food is fuel.”

What you feed your body

Is what fuels your performance.

Food gives you energy.

Food keeps your body going.

Food strengthens your bones, muscles and heart.

“The *lighter* you are, the faster you will run.”

I want to be fast.

Do I eat before I run?

I am hungry, but not that hungry.

It will be better - I will be *skinnier*.

I can wait until after practice.

“Eat clean and watch your calories.”

I haven't eaten yet today,

But this has 15g of sugar.

I would rather wait for something healthier.

That pizza looks so good,

One slice won't hurt.

I'll workout an extra 20 minutes for it.

I want to be fast.

I need to be *thin*.

“Work hard - really push yourself.”

I feel very *tired*.

I have no energy to even finish the warmup.

One rep down, I feel *dizzy*.

3 more. I can do it.

I am finished but feel *sick* to my stomach.

I am empty.

“Good luck! You are going to do great!”

Looking around at the other runners

Deciding who is fast and who is not

Before they ever even race.

Because thinner is faster.

Eat less, run fast.

“Food is fuel”
 What you feed your body
 Is what fuels your performance.
 Food gives you energy.
 Food keeps your body going.
 Food strengthens your bones, muscles and heart.

“The *stronger* and *fitter* you are, the faster you will run”
 I want to be fast.
 Do I eat before I run?
 I am hungry, so I am going to eat.
 I will feel energized - I will be *stronger*.
 I cannot wait to dominate this practice.

“Eat clean and watch your calories”
 I haven’t eaten yet today,
 So I am going to fuel my body.
 I would rather feel satisfied.
 That pizza looks so good,
 I’m going to eat it until I am full.
 I don’t need to earn my food, my fuel.
 I want to be fast.
 I need to be *strong*.

“Work hard - really push yourself.”
 I feel very *fresh*.
 I have energy to do my best in this workout.
 One rep down, I feel *great*.
 3 more. I can do it.
 I am finished and am exhausted but feel *healthy*.
 I am proud.

“Good luck! You are going to do great!”
 Not looking around at the other runners
 Deciding who is fast and who is not
 Before they ever even race.
 Because it can look different for everyone.
 Eat, run fast.

Project Statement

For this assignment, I decided to focus on our Fit but Fat / Body Image unit. The conversations we had during that class about BMI and the way we classify whether someone is fit or not really resonated with me. I have been an athlete my whole life but body image never became that pressing of an issue until I started running, specifically at the collegiate level. Everything we put into our bodies is a direct reflection of how we perform and our coaches make sure to remind us of that frequently. Through the readings we did in class, it is easy to conclude that the BMI standard is inaccurate due to the lack of diversification when it was established as well as the fact that weight can look different on certain bodies. While it can measure someone's weight in regards to their height, it does not take into account their health habits or their risk of health problems (Lemond). However, beyond the BMI, there are systemic issues in the ways we view body image in sports and the ways collegiate and professional running programs educate athletes - specifically females.

Recently, professional female runners have been speaking out about their horrifying experiences with food in their sport. Coaches are requesting that athletes are fed meager meals and instill in them a fear of snacking and "unhealthy" foods. Allie Kiefer, a professional marathon runner, explained that her coaches at Wake Forest valued being thin over being strong. She was advised to drink tea before meals to "shrink the size of her stomach" (Caron). Mary Cain, a former professional runner for Nike, would be worried to open protein bars in fear that her coaches would hear the wrapper and scold her eating habits. With the guidance of her coaches and dieticians, her eating habits caused her to lose her period for three years and she broke five bones (Cain). These are just two horror stories among several others from both professional and young athletes.

Success in sport, whether that be running or something else, can come in many different forms. The thinnest person on the track is not always the fastest the same way that the largest person on a football field is not always the best. Size is relative; each body carries muscle and fat differently. We each have our own ways of becoming fit and healthy and it is up to us to capitalize on what works best for ourselves. Allie Kieffer discovered through therapy and rehab that the way she was treating her body was wearing her down rather than setting her up to succeed. She understands that someone's weight to muscle ratio will impact how fast you are, but it can be done in a positive, personalized way (Caron). The more we acknowledge the corruption that exists with food in the sports industry, the closer we will get to creating a culture where a healthy relationship between the two exists.

This topic was difficult for me to address, as I have found myself struggling with this over the past year and a half. Personally, my coaches have no ill-intentions with the way they advise my eating habits, but they have come across in ways that formed unhealthy eating habits in my life. I have been told to consider intermittent fasting, avoid sugary food options, limit carbs and eat more greens. While these can all be helpful ways to watch your weight and stay on the right track physically, it has had some implications. In high school, I would eat when I was hungry and often sought out the healthy options because they were the tastiest in my eyes. Now, the fear of sugar and carbs often leads to binges which leaves me feeling guilty. I am nowhere near where I want to end up on my journey with food, but I think that I am on the right track. The more I learn about our bodies, food's impact on sports and first-hand stories of other athletes creating a healthy relationship with food, the closer I will get to my goal. This class has allowed me to better understand how and why our bodies function the way they do athletically as well as generally on a day-to-day basis and I will take away several pieces of valuable information.

Works Cited

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Self-Assessment

Throughout the course of this class and during this assignment I learned that our bodies are unique and individualized to meet our own personal needs. Two people weighing the same amount can look completely different depending on things such as their height, their muscle composition and where they carry their weight. While weight and muscle are important components of speed and athletic performance, food is ultimately the main source of fuel to keep us going. I have known of the corrupt culture around food in sports, but I was able to learn more about the corruption that exists with weight outside of sports. I had heard that BMI was inaccurate but I never knew exactly why and definitely did not understand the racial implications that go along with it. We were not created to fit one specific body type or standard; we all have different qualities that make us who we are.

This project was difficult for me because of how personal it is. This topic has strong emotional ties to me and it was challenging to write about something that hits so close to home. I also am not very familiar with writing poetry so it was difficult for me to find an effective way to display the information in poem form. I overcame these challenges by re-reading my poem and revising it so that it flowed cohesively as one piece. To overcome the emotional challenges, I asked my teammates to read my work and give me feedback. They let me know that they could relate to the things I was saying and felt secure knowing that they were not alone. I also read it both to myself and out loud to see if I was happy with the way it was flowing. Finding information was not that difficult for me because of how passionate I am about this topic. It is very interesting to me to read about ways I can improve my nutrition as well as my mental health when it comes to sports.

To be honest I am very proud of my final product. It is very moving for me to read and has also made an impact on my teammates that took the time to read it. Problems with food are an unspoken issue within sports (at least within track and field) and I think it is important to acknowledge that these issues exist. Having the power to alleviate someone's feeling of isolation is very important to me; after reading the poem people said they felt heard, inspired and valued. Above anything, I wanted this project to touch the life of at least one person and I have already seen that it has done so. Even if it did not, it has touched my own life and reminded me that I am making progress on my journey and achieving my goal is attainable.

One thing I could have done better in this assignment would be to somehow incorporate a visual element or collect real data to include in the poem in some way. I think it would have been powerful to have quotes from actual athletes regarding their relationship with food, but I know it can be difficult to ask athletes to open up about this. I wanted to make sure that I did not trigger anyone or create an uncomfortable environment, so I decided to stick to my own experiences. A visual to accompany the poem may have wrapped it all up in a creative way, but I could not think of an effective way to do this that captured the entire message of my poem. Overall, I really enjoyed this assignment and this class and would recommend it to anyone considering it in the future!