

INTERVIEW:

Deanna Busteed MS, RDN, CSSD



How long have you been involved in performance nutrition and what drew you to it?

I have been involved in performance nutrition for the past 15 years. I was drawn to the field as a former college athlete. Performance nutrition really combines my love and appreciation for both exercise science and nutrition. I love the opportunity to maximize the health and performance of young athletes through dietary and lifestyle changes. It is an incredibly rewarding feeling when I am able to contribute to the success of an individual athlete and/or the success of a team!

You work as the sole sports dietitian at George Mason University, which has over 500 student-athletes. Seeing all of them would be impossible, so what strategies do you employ to get the message of good sports nutrition practices to the masses?

It is impossible to reach every athlete and at times it is difficult to educate every team about the benefits of positive sports nutrition practices. We do have a website (GoMason.com) that has a lot of great general sports nutrition information [along with a dining guide](#) which highlights some food venues at each of the schools in the NCAA Atlantic 10 (A10) Conference. In addition, I do offer and provide [sports nutrition lectures](#) for individual teams at different time points during the year. I am also available for individual sports nutrition consults. It is important to note that athletes with a medical need are prioritized before performance based consults.

A great deal of my time is spent collaborating with our terrific sports medicine and sports performance teams (which includes both athletic trainers and strength & conditioning coaches). Having a strong collaborative relationship with them really helps to reinforce good sports nutrition practices on a daily basis. I could not do my job without the support of the incredible professionals who work so closely with our athletes on a daily basis!

What are the most common challenges you see among the student-athletes and what tools/methods do you use to help overcome them?

The most common challenges I see among the student-athletes are as follows:

- eating frequently enough throughout the day
- eating protein spread evenly throughout the day (protein distribution)

- consuming adequate carbohydrates on a daily basis to support metabolic needs and the demands of training and competition
- consuming adequate calories to support the above
- nutritional quality of the overall diet

Sports nutrition is highly customized and very unique to each individual athlete. There are so many variables to consider when helping an individual athlete achieve their fueling goals. The best way to assist an athlete is to get the athlete to “buy in” to the benefits of good sports nutrition practices and then to work with them individually over time to make adjustments based on their individual responses. Practicing good sports nutrition takes time and effort. Individual athletes will reap the positive benefits over time!

Athletes are notorious for trying to find any performance edge they can, which often leads to using some dubious supplements. What is your philosophy when an athlete comes to you wanting to use a supplement?

I employ a “food first” philosophy when it comes to obtaining a performance advantage. When an athlete comes to meet with me looking for an “edge”, I strongly encourage them to consider optimizing their sports nutrition practices prior to incorporating any type of dietary supplement. There are several dietary components that can offer a performance edge. If a supplement is strongly desired, or the athlete is adamant about taking a particular supplement, my approach is to ensure that the risk of taking a supplement is minimized.

I encourage athletes to look for supplements that have been tested and certified under the [NSF Certified for Sport®](#) program. This program, which focuses primarily on the sports supplement manufacturing and sourcing process, provides key preventative measures to help protect against the adulteration of products, verify label claims against product contents, and includes screening for 200+ substances banned by

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most major athletic organizations (including stimulants, narcotics, steroids, diuretics, beta-2-agonists, masking agents and other substances).

While no certification provides a 100% guarantee, NSF certification involves regular on-site inspections of manufacturing facilities and regular re-testing of products to ensure that they continue to meet the same high standards required to maintain certification over time.

You also work with the [Center for the Advancement of Well-Being at GMU](#). Are there any simple strategies that athletes can incorporate to improve their wellness?

In addition to optimizing their sports nutrition practices, I find that most athletes can benefit from managing their overall stress levels and prioritizing sleep. Being a college athlete is a “full-time job” and requires a great deal of time, effort, and energy. Making time for some laughter and enjoyment, as well as relaxation and sleep can have dramatic benefits on an athlete’s overall well-being.

You recently [published a study looking at the effect a sports dietitian can have on dietary habits of NCAA athletes](#).

What were some of the findings you found most interesting or those that would be most helpful to other practitioners?

Some may not realize this, but sports nutrition is a relatively new as a well-developed field of study. There are currently less than 100 full time sports RD’s that work in colleges or in a professional setting. So there is not a lot of data looking at the effects of having a sports RD on staff can have in athletes. The paper highlights the benefits to athletes and sports performance staff (coaches, athletic trainers, strength coaches) of having a sports RD working as a part of the athletic performance team. For example, those who used the sports RD as the primary nutrition information source had a better understanding of nutrient periodization and were less likely to consume fast food prior to practice or while traveling for competitions. ♦

Deanna Busted MS, RDN, CSSD is presently the sports dietitian for George Mason’s Center for Sports Performance, servicing over 500 Division I athletes, a member of the adjunct faculty teaching Sport and Exercise Nutrition in the College of Education and Human Development, and serves as a Senior Fellow for the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, an interdisciplinary research and teaching center at George Mason University dedicated to catalyzing human well-being. Deanna currently resides in Vienna, Virginia with her husband, 2 school-aged children, her two cats (Spaghetti and Meatball) and her dog. She enjoys spending time with her family and fur babies, cooking, traveling and practicing yoga and pilates.