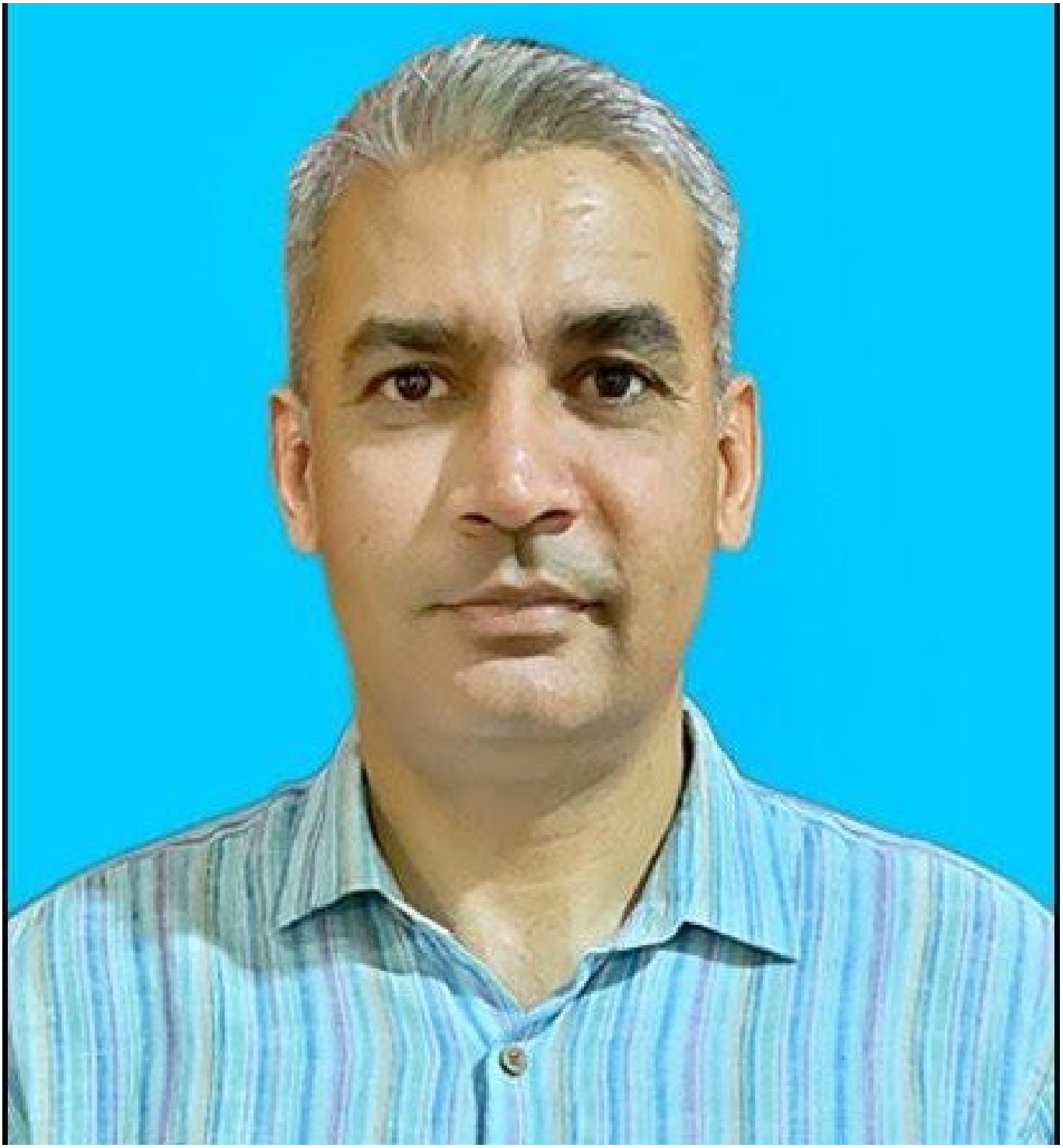
INTERVIEWS | INTERVIEW

“The nutritional requirements of athletes vary depending on their age and the specific sport they engage in”

Col Devraj Gill, Commandant, Army Sports Institute, Pune

By **Mansi Jamsudkar** | October 9, 2023



Col.-Devraj-Gill-Commandant-Army-Sports-Institute-Pune

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Col Devraj Gill, Commandant, Army Sports Institute, Pune

Ensuring a healthy diet that offers sufficient energy and essential nutrients is crucial for an athlete's performance on the field, as well as their ability to sustain rigorous training and recover from injuries. Colonel Devraj Gill, Commandant of the Army Sports Institute, talks to nuFFOODS Spectrum about how nutrition requirements vary for different sports and athletes.

Edited excerpts:

Can you provide us with an overview of the importance of nutrition in an athlete's performance and overall well-being?

Nutrition plays an important role in an athlete's on-field performance, aiding in both strength-building and injury recovery. It possesses the dual capability of healing and enhancing physical capabilities. The nutritional requirements of athletes vary depending on their age and the specific sport they engage in.

What steps does the institute follow while prescribing players' diet?

Sports nutrition is a science, and we follow certain protocols while devising diet plans for our athletes. First, we conduct blood tests to assess their body composition. We also take into account their food preferences, food allergies, and any underlying medical conditions when designing their diet plans.

How important are nutrition supplements for a player?

Nutrition supplements are of utmost importance. They complement athletes' dietary requirements, especially in aiding recovery after intense training sessions. Many Indian athletes prefer vegetarian diets, relying on sources like paneer, tofu, and lentils for protein. However, some of the athletes who are largely vegetarians may consume limited amounts of meat, with individual preferences. Athletes such as wrestlers, long-distance runners, or weightlifters require red meat, which is not the meat of choice for everyone. In such cases, we provide protein supplements.

What kind of collaboration does it take between different members of the athlete support team, including the coach, trainer, and nutritionist?

In an athlete’s performance, collaboration among all stakeholders is important. This includes the athlete, trainer, coach, nutritionist, sports medicine specialist, and since we are an Army institute, an officer in charge of each sports discipline. These team members work collectively to develop training programmes and nutritional plans. The coach and athlete both provide their input, which the nutritionist uses to create a personalised plan. Then a sports medicine specialist guides the athlete to execute it.

Are there any ethical considerations in sports nutrition, when it comes to dietary supplements?

We source supplements only from internationally approved vendors, each endorsed by international doping agencies.

We conduct regular awareness sessions for our athletes, advising them against using unapproved products. Representatives from organisations like the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) routinely visit to test athletes' blood samples for banned substances. We also carry out internal random checks to ensure a clean and doping-free environment for competition.

Some young athletes or those involved in high-intensity sports tend to take banned performance-enhancing substances, risking their careers. What is your message for them?

I firmly believe that success in sports requires dedication and hard work, with no shortcuts to excellence. Attempting to take shortcuts, such as using performance-enhancing substances, can lead to serious consequences, including the end of one's career. Impatience, often driven by athletes, parents, coaches, and trainers, can push individuals towards such drastic measures.

In India, many athletes tend to play for a few years and then transition to other careers. To excel during this limited time frame, some resort to unapproved supplements. However, athletes must lead disciplined lives, strictly adhering to their diet, exercise, and sleep routines. Consistency and dedication over the years often yield success. This is the true spirit of sportsmanship. And the effort is worth it.

Gunjan Sharma

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