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# **Low FODMAP: A Preliminary Strategy to Reduce Gastrointestinal Distress in Athletes**

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## ***Abstract***

**Introduction:** Gastrointestinal (GI) distress in endurance athletes is prevalent and detrimental to performance. Adverse GI symptomatology can be analogous with irritable bowel syndrome, where fermentable oligosaccharide, disaccharide, monosaccharide and polyols (FODMAP) reduction has demonstrated efficacy. This study investigated the effects of low FODMAP (LFOD) diet on GI distress parameters in runners with a history of non-clinical exercise-associated GI symptoms. **Methods:** Eleven recreationally competitive runners (5 males, 6 females; 5km personal best 23:00±4:02 min:sec) participated in the study. Runners were allocated to a randomized 6-day LFOD or high FODMAP (HFOD) diet separated by a 1-day wash-out in a controlled, single-blinded cross-over study. In each period participants completed two strenuous running sessions consisting of 5x1000m and a 7km threshold run. GI symptoms (during-exercise and daily) and the Daily Analysis of Life Demand for Athletes (DALDA) questionnaires were completed. Area under the curve (AUC) was calculated for daily GI symptoms across each dietary period and analysis was conducted using multilevel mixed-effects linear regression for comparison between the two diets. **Results:** A significantly smaller AUC for daily GI symptoms.6-days<sup>-1</sup> during the LFOD compared to HFOD (mean difference -13.4, 95% CI [-22, -4.60], P=0.003) was observed. The daily GI symptoms that were significantly lower during LFOD were flatulence (P<0.001), urge to defecate (P=0.04), loose stool (P=0.03) and diarrhea (P=0.004). No significant differences in during exercise symptoms or DALDA responses were observed between diets (p>0.05). **Conclusion:** Preliminary findings suggest that short-term FODMAP reduction may be a beneficial intervention to minimize daily GI symptoms in runners with exercise-related GI distress.

**Key words:** gastrointestinal distress, exercise, diet, short-chain carbohydrates, athlete, runner's trots

## *Introduction*

Optimal athletic performance can be directly compromised by gastrointestinal (GI) dysfunction (1). High rates of GI distress are reported to occur in 30-50% of endurance athletes (2, 3). Although most symptoms occurring are mild to moderate, severe symptoms may impair training capacity and performance (2). During strenuous exercise GI symptoms are triggered in part by significant splanchnic hypoperfusion, as blood is shunted away from the GI tract towards the working muscles, which instigates acute enterocyte injury, increased intestinal permeability and altered motility (4). Symptoms associated with exercise-induced GI distress are numerous, but many are analogous with clinical indications associated with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) (5, 4). In particular, lower abdominal symptoms such as diarrhea, bloating, abdominal pain and flatulence share remarkable similarities in both conditions. Interestingly, fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols (FODMAP) restriction has been emerging as an efficacious treatment for IBS symptoms (6, 7, 5, 8). Therefore, it is plausible that FODMAP manipulation may also positively affect exercise-associated GI symptoms (9, 10).

Nutritionists and athletes employ various dietary strategies to reduce exercise-associated GI distress, including limiting dietary fiber and lactose, eating low-residue foods around competition, training the gut to tolerate larger carbohydrate loads or removing gluten (11, 12). A gluten-free diet has become a popular regimen to supposedly alleviate exercise-associated in non-celiac athletes (13) and IBS-related GI symptoms (14) although negligible peer-reviewed evidence exists supporting these anecdotal claims (13). Conversely, data in non-athlete clinical populations proposes that GI symptom improvement associated with gluten elimination may actually be modulated by the subsequent reduction in FODMAP content that generally accompanies a gluten-free diet, and not necessarily gluten elimination itself (3, 15). A low FODMAP diet is predicted to be the next popular equivalent to the gluten-free diet (16).

FODMAPs are poorly absorbed short chain carbohydrates that have been shown to increase osmotic load in the small intestine and colonic gas volume, which instigates adverse symptoms in hypersensitive individuals (10). Examples of foods restricted with a low FODMAP diet include: lactose-containing products such as cow's milk, a range of fruit high in fructose, wheat-based products, onions and garlic encompassing fructans and galactooligosaccharides, and fruits with stones (pits) or confectionary with naturally occurring or added polyols. In Western diets up to 40 g of undigested carbohydrates reach the colon daily (17) including an average of 1-10 g.day<sup>-1</sup> of inulin and oligofructans (18). In sensitive individuals, FODMAPs can cause adverse GI symptoms. FODMAPs are also important dietary constituents offering favorable prebiotic effects such as acting as a substrate for beneficial microbial populations, increasing stool bulk, enhancing micronutrient absorption and immune function (19), so unnecessary restriction is not advocated. To date, studies suggest that healthy individuals without IBS would not benefit from restricting FODMAP intake (9, 20) and a prolonged strict low FODMAP diet does not appear to be a common practice amongst athletes (21). However, in athletes looking to reduce GI symptoms self-reported data indicates that over half eliminate high FODMAP foods, without necessarily realizing that these foods were considered part of the FODMAP family (21). Eighty-six percent of these athletes report subsequent symptom improvement (21). Therefore, it is plausible that the physiological mechanisms and symptoms associated with exercise-associated GI injury increase sensitivity to all, or some FODMAPs, and it is relevant to consider if symptoms could be reduced with FODMAP restriction in endurance athletes.

We have recently published a case study showing positive outcomes of a low FODMAP dietary intervention in a multisport athlete (22). Based on these results, and encouraging clinical research on low FODMAP diets (10), it is imperative that the manipulation of short-chain carbohydrate be investigated as a novel tool for individualized dietary management aimed at

attenuating GI distress in a group of healthy athletes. Hence, the purpose of this preliminary study was to examine the effect of a low FODMAP vs a high FODMAP diet on symptoms of self-reported GI distress and perceived wellbeing in clinically healthy recreationally competitive runners with a history of GI symptoms. Our *a priori* hypothesis was that a short-term low FODMAP diet would reduce the severity of GI symptoms appearing daily and during strenuous running sessions.

## ***Methods***

### *Participants*

Eleven recreational competitive runners (>25 km running per week) aged 18-50 years with self-reported persistent exercise-associated GI symptoms were invited to participate in this study. Inclusion criteria included: a minimum of three chronic exercise-associated GI symptoms (e.g. nausea, bloating, diarrhea) with score greater than 4 (quite often) on the background GI questionnaire (23), a habitual high FODMAP intake of  $\geq 20$  g FODMAP.day<sup>-1</sup> (24) as assessed with the Complete Nutrition Assessment Questionnaire (CNAQ; <http://www.cnaq.com.au/>) (25) and the capacity to complete two consecutive days of prescribed strenuous running training during the study. Exclusion criteria included: a history of food intolerance (e.g. diagnosed lactose intolerance), known celiac disease or known familial history of celiac disease, clinically diagnosed non-celiac gluten sensitivity or IBS, current adherence to any special diet, or any pre-existing medical condition that could be affected by dietary intervention. The dietary intervention periods were purposefully scheduled to avoid the potential influence of hormone changes over the menstrual cycle for the female runners. Ethics approval was obtained from the Tasmanian Health and Medical Human Research Ethics Committee (H0015151). All participants provided signed informed consent.

### *Experimental Design*

Utilizing a single-blind, cross-over design participants were randomized to receive either a high FODMAP (HFOD) or a low FODMAP (LFOD) diet for 6-days, separated by a 1-day washout, followed by the alternative diet (Figure 1). Randomization was generated using GraphPad QuickCals software. Participants were informed that they would be assigned “*Specific Carbohydrate Diet A or B*” for the first dietary period then the alternate diet for the subsequent dietary period, with no specific reference to FODMAPs or gluten. Participants self-selected their training schedule based on study guidelines (see details below). All training was replicated during the subsequent dietary period. Participants were asked to record their daily exercise, food intake and complete a post-exercise GI questionnaire, daily GI questionnaire and Daily Analysis of Life Demands (DALDA) questionnaire each day throughout the two dietary periods.

### *Food Preparation & Provision*

Participants were provided with pre-made frozen lunch and dinner meals (prepared, weighed and frozen in a commercial kitchen; Matson’s Catering, Launceston, Australia), breakfast (cereals, breads, milk, yoghurt) and snack foods (muesli bars, crackers). As the study participants were blinded, all food was packaged in the same opaque containers and labeled according to each dietary period (e.g. week-1 muesli bars, day-2 lunch). Alongside the controlled study food provisions, the participants were able to self-select from a suggested list (of *choose* and *avoid*) and supplement the study food with fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts with the stipulation that a counterpart substitution be exchanged in the second dietary period. A registered dietitian (lead researcher) provided dietary education to participants on nutrition intake recording and appropriate food selections. LFOD and HFOD meals were established based on previous research (20), Monash University’s low FODMAP diet resources



(<http://www.med.monash.edu/cecs/gastro/fodmap/>) and typical athlete diets (26). Recipes for LFOD and HFOD were similar, but ingredients modified to alter the FODMAP content (Table 1). Meals were matched for content of total energy, protein, carbohydrate, fat and fiber; however, resistant starch information was not available due to the absence of comprehensive resistant starch food composition tables. Each meal was analyzed for FODMAP content using a FODMAP specific database (Monash University, FoodWorks Professional 7, Xyris, Brisbane, Australia) to ensure that LFOD meals contained less  $<0.5$  g FODMAP.meal<sup>-1</sup> (27). An example of the study meals for each diet are provided in Table 1. The prototype study menu presented a macronutrient profile containing carbohydrate 5-7 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>, protein 1.2-1.7 g.kg<sup>-1</sup> and fat 0.8-1.2 g.kg<sup>-1</sup> (26) (FoodWorks Professional 7, Xyris, Brisbane, Australia).

#### *Exercise and Prescribed Running*

Participants self-selected their training schedule based on study guidelines which indicated: day 1 and 2 to be light to moderate intensity training, day 3 to be rest or very light non-running exercise (e.g. yoga, swimming). Day 4 and 5 were prescribed very intense running sessions and day 6 was entirely self-selected exercise or rest. Day 4 (interval session) consisted of a 10 min self-prescribed warm up with increasing intensity, 5 x 1000 m interval pace (100% of predicted  $vV_{O_{2max}}$ ) with 3-min brisk walk or light jog between intervals followed by a 10-min self-selected cool down. Day 5 (threshold session) consisted of a 7–10 min self-selected warm up with increasing intensity, 7 km at threshold pace (~90% of predicted  $vV_{O_{2max}}$ ) followed by a 10-min self-selected cool down. Prescribed running sessions were individually monitored using participants' personal Garmin GPS running watches (Forerunner® 735XT, 630XT, 235 or 910XT) and all training was replicated in the second intervention period. Interval and threshold paces were individually prescribed based on calculations from a recent race performance using



VDOT (velocity at  $v\dot{V}O_{2\max}$ ) tables (28). Running sessions were completed on flat terrain, at the same time of day ( $\pm 30$  min) over the period of data collection (December 2015 to February 2016).

### *Gastrointestinal Symptom Monitoring*

During-exercise GI questionnaires and daily GI questionnaires were used to assess the occurrence and severity of upper and lower abdominal symptoms determined using a 10-point scale ranging from 0 “no problem at all” to 9 “the worst it has ever been” (23). Section 1 of the questionnaire addresses upper abdominal symptoms: reflux, heartburn, burping, bloating, stomach pain/cramps, vomiting and nausea. Section 2 addresses lower abdominal symptoms: flatulence, urge to defecate, left abdominal pain (side stitch), right abdominal pain (side stitch), loose stool, diarrhea and intestinal bleeding (23). Diarrhea criteria was defined as an increase in the number of bowel movements per day compared with the participants usual bowel habit. Participants completed the during-exercise GI questionnaire immediately following their training session and the daily GI questionnaire at the end of each day at the same time. GI symptom scores were tabulated for each day and exercise session (23). Mean scores for daily GI symptoms, during-exercise GI symptoms, and incremental area under the curve (AUC) for daily GI symptoms across all 6-days of each dietary period were compared between the diets.

### *Perceptual Wellbeing Monitoring*

Participants completed the DALDA questionnaire at the end of each day. This questionnaire is used to assess general stress levels (Part A) and to determine stress-reaction symptoms (Part B) using a rating scheme of “worse than normal,” “normal,” or “better than normal” for variables. Scores were tabulated and the “worse than normal” and “better than normal” scores compared between the two dietary periods.

## *Statistical Analysis*

All GI symptoms and DALDA scores and dietary variables were treated as continuous data (29) and compared between the two diets using multilevel mixed-effects repeated measure linear regression adjusted for order and period effects (Stata 13.0, StataCorp LP, College Station, TX). Regression residuals were tested for assumptions of linear regression (heteroscedasticity, skewness, kurtosis or linearity). Where regression residuals did not meet the assumptions of linear regression the analyses were repeated with multilevel mixed-effects ordered logistic regression. For consistency, all comparison results are presented as mean difference (95% Confidence Interval). For each dietary intake variable, the mean±SD was calculated and compared between the diets using mixed-effects ordered logistic regression. P values ( $P < 0.05$ ) are from the relevant analyses (linear regression or ordered logistics regression in case of violation of linear regression assumptions). Incremental AUC, above zero, for daily GI symptoms was calculated from total daily GI symptom scores over each 6-day diet (GraphPad Prism, version 6.0, San Diego, CA) and compared between the two diets.

## **Results**

### *Participants details and compliance*

Dietary intake (Table 2), GI symptom assessment (Figure 2) and DALDA results were available for 11 of 12 participants (5 males, 6 females,  $41 \pm 10$  years, weight  $69.0 \pm 12.0$  kg, height  $171.1 \pm 10.0$  cm, 5 km personal best  $23:00 \pm 04:02$  min:sec). One participant was removed due to incomplete data. Background GI symptoms, primarily boating, flatulence, urge to defecate and loose stool were predominant and were reported to occur *quite often to always* (score of  $\geq 4$  to 9). Total habitual daily FODMAP intake was  $43.8 \pm 16.9$  g FODMAPs.day<sup>-1</sup>. The prescribed running sessions were completed as assigned, and exercise volume matched in each period (HFOD total exercise volume 50:12:43 hh:min:sec,  $0:56:51 \pm 0:25:33$  daily mean±SD; LFOD

50:36:42, 0:57:18±0:23:55) with no significant differences in temperature (16.2±5.2 vs 15.7±4.9°C) or humidity (64.0±14.9 vs 55.3±19.6%) for the LFOD or HFOD dietary periods, respectively.

All participants consumed the prescribed diets and dietary intake was analyzed from food intake records for HFOD and LFOD. The composition of the diets is shown in Table 2. The two test diets were similarly matched for total energy, carbohydrate, and fiber. Protein and fat were statistically different between the diets (P=0.03 and P=0.003, respectively). These differences are of negligible clinical significance given the 5 g protein and 7 g fat daily variances. As designed, FODMAP intake differed significantly between the two diets being 41.4±7.9 g.day<sup>-1</sup> HFOD and 8.1±3.5 g.day<sup>-1</sup> LFOD (P<0.0001).

#### *Gastrointestinal Symptoms: Daily and During Exercise*

Daily GI symptoms scores were collected each day of the study and tabulated. Individual AUC responses show that 82.0% (9 of 11) of participants had a smaller AUC for daily GI symptom scores.6-days<sup>-1</sup> during the LFOD compared to HFOD (mean difference -13.4, 95% CI [-22, -4.60], P=0.003; Figure 2a). The group AUC (Figure 2b) was lower in LFOD (31.4±24.6; mean±SD) compared to HFOD (44.6±33.6). Specific daily GI symptoms that were reduced during LFOD included: flatulence (mean difference -1.12 95% CI [-1.55, -0.75], P<0.001), urge to defecate (mean difference -0.41, 95% CI [-0.81, -0.02], P=0.04), loose stool (mean difference -0.38, 95% CI [-0.73, -0.04], P=0.03) and diarrhea (mean difference -0.45, 95% CI [-0.75, -0.14], P=0.004). The mean GI symptoms scores for day 1 to 6 were higher during HFOD compared to LFOD (mean difference -2.45, 95% CI [-4.21, -0.69], P=0.006; Figure 2c). No order or period effects were observed for total daily GI symptoms, during-exercise GI symptoms on any of analyzed variables except for loose stool (mean difference -0.35, 95% CI [-0.79, -0.01], P=0.03).

During-exercise GI symptoms scores for the HFOD and LFOD dietary periods for day 4 and day 5, when prescribed strenuous running sessions, were compared. Half of the participants rated GI symptoms during the prescribed running sessions to be moderate to severe ( $\geq 3$ ). Burping was the one symptom that was significantly higher (mean difference 0.30, 95% CI [0.01, 0.58],  $P=0.04$ ) during LFOD compared to HFOD. No significant differences in any other GI symptoms were found during the prescribed running sessions between HFOD and LFOD.

### *Perceptual Wellbeing*

Overall wellbeing was measured using DALDA and the worse and better than normal scores were compared for each dietary period, as well as the scores on the prescribed training days (day 4 and 5). Total worse than normal scores for stress (part A) and stress response (part B) combined were not different (mean difference -0.45, 95% CI [-1.30, 0.40],  $P=0.30$ ) during HFOD ( $3.71\pm 3.18$ ) compared to LFOD ( $3.30\pm 3.31$ ). Similarly, total better than normal scores for the HFOD ( $2.59\pm 2.80$ ) and LFOD ( $2.97\pm 3.66$ ) were not significantly different across each dietary period (mean difference 0.43, 95% CI [-0.52, 1.37],  $P=0.38$ ). Total worse than normal scores on day 4 or day 5 were not different (mean difference -0.82, 95% CI [-2.26, 0.63],  $P=0.30$ ; mean difference -0.91, 95% CI [-2.35, 0.53],  $P=0.25$ , respectively). Total better than normal scores on day 4 or day 5 were not different (mean difference 0.5, 95% CI [-1.11, 2.11],  $P=0.55$ ; mean difference 1.23, 95% CI [-0.39, 2.84],  $P=0.10$ , respectively). No order or period effects were observed for DALDA scores.

### *Discussion*

Dietary intake, and its interactions with strenuous exercise, are of particular importance to athletes as resulting GI distress is a common problem potentially impairing training capacity and performance (12). This is the first study to examine the effects of a short-term low FODMAP

diet on GI symptoms and perceptual wellbeing in athletes with a history of exercise-associated GI distress. The aim of this preliminary study was to investigate if self-reported and case-study outcomes, demonstrating beneficial effects of FODMAP reduction on exercise-associated GI symptoms (22, 21), could be substantiated in a larger cohort. Results from this preliminary study indicate that a low FODMAP diet had a positive effect on daily GI symptoms in 82% of participants.

#### *Effect of low FODMAPs on daily GI symptoms*

In participants with persistent exercise-associated GI symptoms, 9 of the 11 reported a reduction in daily GI symptoms on a short-term low FODMAP diet (Figure 2). To date, low FODMAP diet research has predominantly focused on clinical populations, specifically individuals with IBS. Discernible symptomatic improvements in approximately 70% of IBS patients encourage the use of this diet as first line treatment (10). A limited number of investigations have included healthy controls (9, 30, 20) and results suggest that although healthy individuals demonstrate functional changes with FODMAP ingestion, GI symptoms remain very minor or non-existent (30, 20). Low level GI symptoms likely have a negligible impact on athletic performance, but more moderate to severe symptoms may be detrimental (1). Although healthy populations, including healthy athletes, would be assumed to not benefit from FODMAP reduction with reduced GI symptoms, it is interesting to consider if the unique physiological, mechanical and nutritional stress encountered by endurance athletes could increase susceptibility to any dietary triggers, such as FODMAPs, for some of these athletes. GI symptoms are largely variable but our preliminary data suggests that a short-term low FODMAP diet may be efficacious in the management of daily GI symptoms (Figure 2); particularly lower abdominal GI symptoms, in healthy athletes. Although changes in GI symptoms during exercise were not found, the ability to reduce daily GI symptoms would be very advantageous in extended events like the Tour de

France, rigorous training camps or multi-event athletics, which feature sequential days of intensive and extensive exercise.

### *Effect of low FODMAPS on exercise specific GI symptoms*

GI symptoms during prescribed running sessions were similar for the HFOD and LFOD dietary periods. In race conditions four to 32% of athletes report GI distress and some symptoms are so severe that withdrawal from competition results (23). Numerous factors exacerbate GI symptoms during exercise including dietary intake/timing, mechanical impact and physiological stress. Significantly greater GI issues are reported during prolonged events (e.g. Ironman), as compared to relatively shorter events, such as the marathon (23). Ingestion of carbohydrates as consumed in endurance sport, particularly solutions with a high osmolality, are associated with the development of GI symptoms during exercise (31). Exercise duration in the current study did not warrant carbohydrate ingestion, however it is interesting to consider if ingestion of short-chain carbohydrates during exercise or pre-existing FODMAPs in the GI tract would have additive osmotic actions and consequent symptoms (2). It is possible that the chosen exercise duration (45-60 min.day<sup>-1</sup>), coupled with no CHO ingestion during exercise, curtailed any measurable difference in during exercise GI symptoms between the diets. Timing of FODMAP intake may also be influencing symptoms. In the present study runners replicated their usual dietary patterns (e.g. timing) before exercise, which was fundamental in this research design to avoid altering habitual food intake timing and adding a confounding variable to the primary measure. Although this study did not investigate mechanistic hypotheses it may also be conceivable that GI symptoms during exercise could be exacerbated with the presence of short-chain carbohydrates in the gut or during exercise FODMAP ingestion. In overall GI symptom reduction, our preliminary findings support further research of the hypothesis that FODMAP reduction would positively affect the severity or occurrence of exercise-associated GI symptoms.

### *Effects of altering FODMAPS on perceptual wellbeing*

Extreme and persistently high chronic training loads are associated with greater psychosomatic stress. Psychological wellbeing, personality traits and psychosocial factors, such as stress, also have the potential to influence perceptions of GI symptom presence and severity (32). The reverse may also occur, in that GI symptoms caused by exercise may be reflected by reductions in overall perceptual wellbeing. In the current study DALDA evaluation was conducted alongside each dietary intervention with the aim to capture the relationship between perceptual wellbeing and GI symptoms influenced by diet and exercise stress. In athletes, the multifactorial nature of GI distress is well known and the influence of psychological wellbeing or stress on alterations of the autonomic nervous system has been recognized (33, 34). These changes in homeostatic balance have been characterized by slowing of gastric emptying, increased distal colonic motility and acceleration of intestinal transit, further contributing to adverse GI symptoms (35). In the present study, it is possible that DALDA was not a sensitive enough tool to detect any FODMAP related changes. A more chronic fatigue state over several days/weeks or longer is likely required to capture changes in DALDA responses (36).

### *Reflections for future studies*

Dietary control was achieved, however three reasons are suggested as to why no difference in GI symptoms were observed during the prescribed strenuous running sessions. First, daily GI symptoms on the LFOD diet were lower compared to HFOD. Lower pre-exercise symptomology during the LFOD may have skewed perceptions of the during exercise GI symptoms toward being more exaggerated (greater net difference) resulting in reporting of higher during exercise symptom scores for LFOD. Secondly, although residual FODMAPs are suggested to transit through the GI tract in less than 3-days (11) a longer period of LFOD may be necessary to augment further symptom reduction. Changes in the gut microbiome occur over time as the



biomass evolves and it is possible that the full benefits of the diet are not realized until 7-days (24) or a few weeks (10). Most importantly, exercise duration and climatic factors have been correlated with GI distress (23). Longer running sessions may be required to distinguish differences in GI symptoms between the diets. Although, the outdoor running climate throughout the current study was moderate with nominal variance between intervention periods, differences in climate and hydration status should be considered as influencers of GI symptoms. A greater effect may be observed under more extreme exercise conditions and future research should consider this element in the methodology.

#### *FODMAP manipulation considerations for the practitioner*

Our developing work proposes that FODMAP manipulation may be an innovative addition to the sport nutrition practitioners' toolbox for management of exercise-associated GI distress. Certain considerations must be taken into account when trialing short-chain carbohydrate restriction with athletes as dietary requirements are individual and unnecessary food restriction may compromise optimal fueling (37). When appropriately planned, under the guidance of a dietetic professional, a low FODMAP diet can be matched for energy, macronutrients and fiber (Table 2). Although differences in protein and fat intake were statistically significant between LFOD and HFOD, 7 and 5 g, respectively, these findings are not clinically significant. As a source of high quality protein, cow-based dairy is often consumed by athletes at or above the general population recommendation of two to four servings per day. Coinciding high lactose intakes are likely (Table 2) and should be investigated as a primary trigger for GI symptoms with appropriate high protein substitutes made, such as lactose free milk if required. A low FODMAP diet should be considered once typical GI symptom triggers have first been assessed, such as lactose (11, 12).

Intakes of prebiotic fructooligosaccharides and galactooligosaccharides, found in high amounts in wheat and legumes, are restricted with a low FODMAP diet, which is concerning. These prebiotics stimulate healthy colonic Bifidobacterium. After 4-weeks of a restricted fermentable carbohydrate diet Bifidobacteria populations were decreased in IBS patients (38). Immune health may be compromised with lower Bifidobacterium count, which is an important consideration for overall athlete immunity and health (39). In athletes, it is unclear if risk associated with decreased healthy bacterial populations due to diet may be more or less apparent as exercise further alters diet-microbe-host metabolic interactions and may support higher gut microorganisms diversity (40). Exercise and an athletes' diet could offer a protective element against a decrease in healthy gut bacterial populations associated with FODMAP restriction. Given the restrictive nature and novelty of this dietary approach a systematic and individualized approach will be obligatory for successful and efficacious implementation of a low FODMAP diet in an athletic setting.

### *Conclusions*

Results from this study have shown that a short-term LFOD results in significantly lower daily GI symptoms over the intervention period compared to a HFOD diet in athletes with a self-reported history of persistent exercise-associated GI distress. Exercise-associated GI distress and pathophysiology of IBS are multifactorial, but both conditions feature similar symptomatology. Although, more work is needed to determine the effectiveness of a low FODMAP diet, our preliminary findings suggest this dietary approach may be applicable beyond the clinical realm and offer a novel strategy to reduce GI symptoms in some symptomatic but otherwise clinically healthy athletes.

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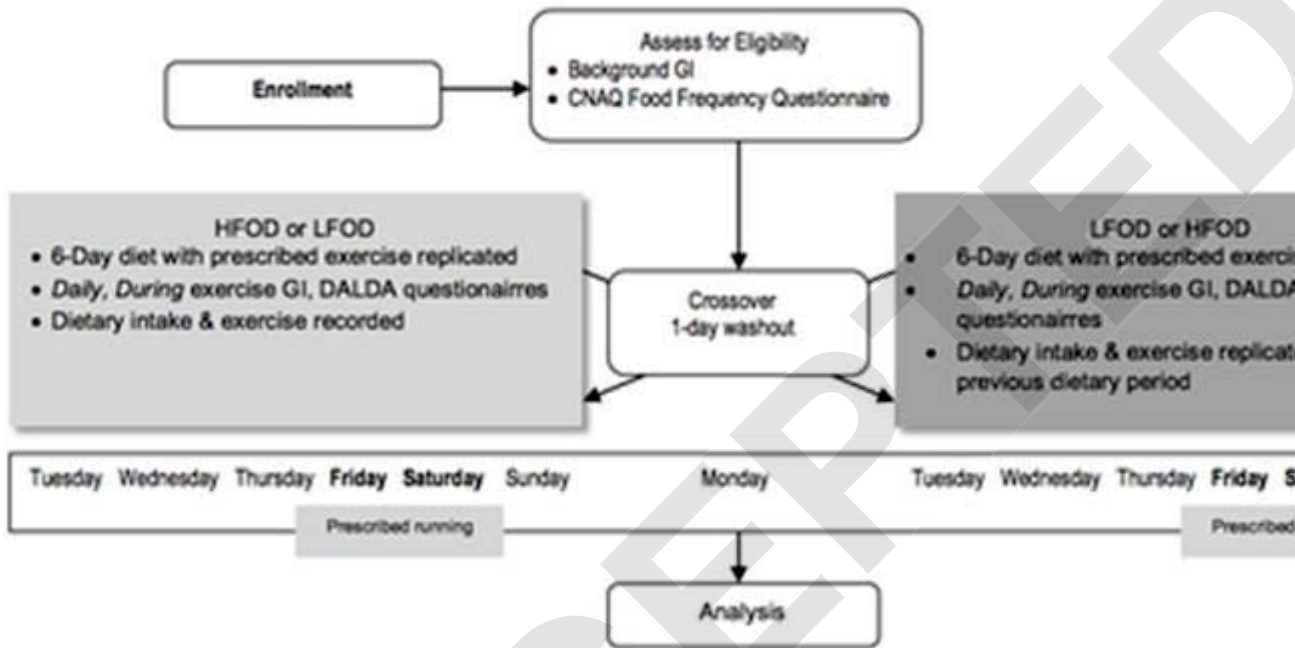


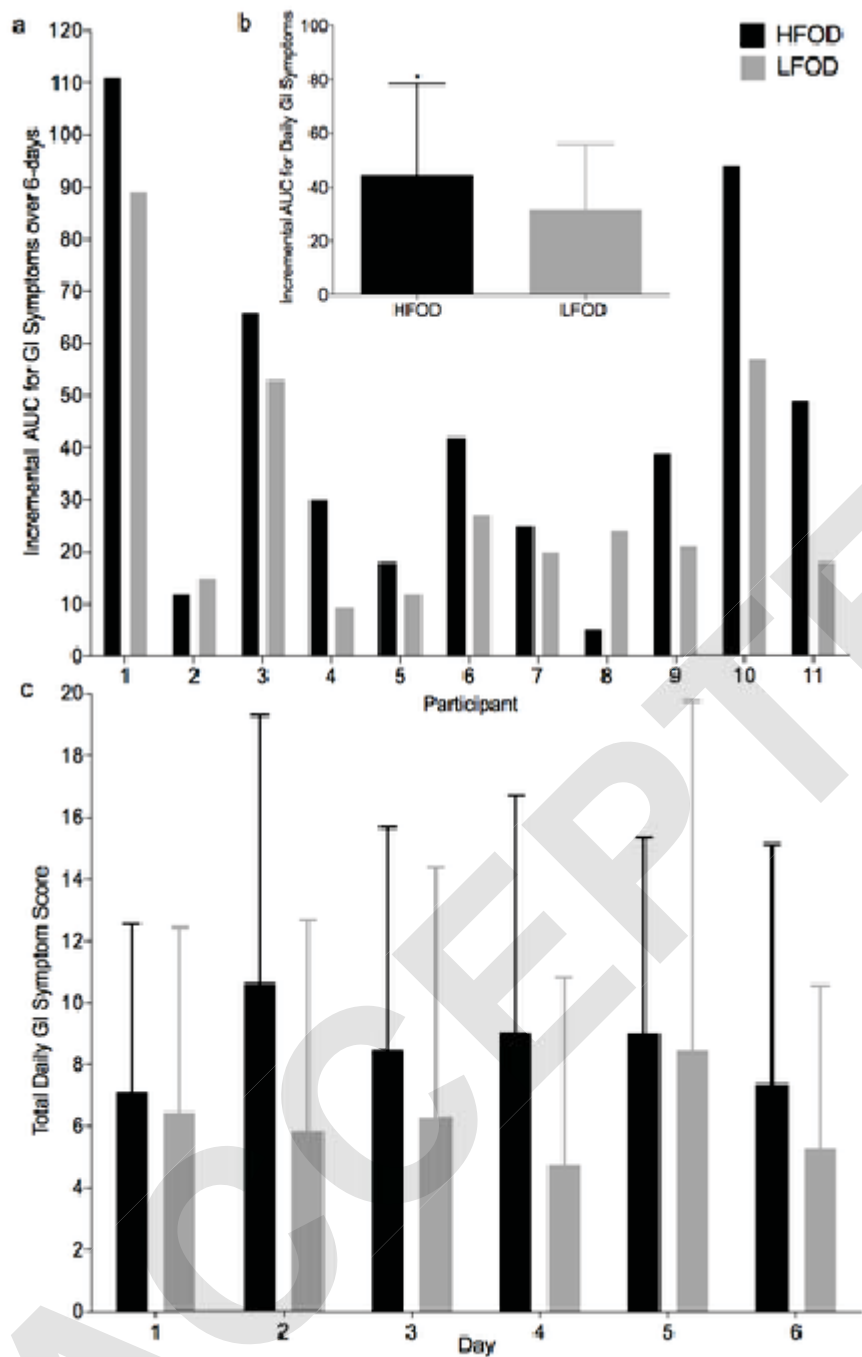
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## *List of Figures*

**Figure 1** – Schematic showing participant selection and study design. LFOD=Low FODMAP diet, HFOD=High FODMAP diet, GI=gastrointestinal, DALDA=Daily Analysis of Life Demands for Athletes

**Figure 2** – (a) Individual area under the curve (AUC) for daily gastrointestinal (GI) symptom scores over 6 days for LFOD vs HFOD (n=11). (b) Mean group AUC during LFOD compared to HFOD for daily GI symptom scores. (c) Mean total daily GI symptom scores for each day (day 1-6) of the dietary period for all participants (error bars represent standard deviations) on LFOD and HFOD (p=0.006). \* Denotes significance (P=0.003)





**Table 1.** Example of high and low FODMAP diets

Meal	Low FODMAP diet	High FODMAP diet
<b>Breakfast</b>	low FODMAP muesli <sup>a</sup> lactose-free milk blueberries coffee/tea with lactose-free milk	muesli with dried fruit and nuts milk apple coffee/tea with milk
<b>Snack</b>	corn Cruskits lactose-free yogurt grapes	rye Cruskits yogurt nectarine
<b>Lunch</b>	maple glazed salmon on quinoa/rice pesto pasta <sup>b</sup>	honey glazed salmon on durum wheat pesto pasta <sup>c</sup>
<b>Snack</b>	gluten-free biscuits cheddar cheese tomato, cucumber	wheat biscuits cheddar cheese snap peas, cucumber
<b>Dinner</b>	grilled chicken and vegetables on quinoa <sup>d</sup>	grilled chicken and vegetables on couscous <sup>e</sup>
<b>Snack</b>	lactose-free yogurt strawberries coffee/tea with lactose-free milk	yogurt cantaloupe coffee/tea with milk

<sup>a</sup> low FODMAP muesli made with rice crispies, corn flakes, quinoa flakes, shredded coconut, and pumpkin seeds

<sup>b</sup> low FODMAP pesto pasta made with: cherry tomatoes, eggplant, garlic infused oil, pine nuts, basil, parsley

<sup>c</sup> high FODMAP pesto pasta made with: cauliflower, asparagus, pistachios nuts, basil, parsley, garlic

<sup>d</sup> low FODMAP vegetables included: small portion sweet potato, red bell pepper, spinach

<sup>e</sup> high FODMAP vegetables included: larger portion of sweet potato, beetroot, garlic, red onion

**Table 2.** Composition of dietary intake during the habitual and low FODMAP dietary periods

Dietary Component	HFOD	LFOD	P value
Total energy (kcal)	3181 ± 403	3198 ± 429	0.724
Total carbohydrate (g)	323 ± 63	327 ± 67	0.569
Total protein (g)	158 ± 16	153 ± 20	0.030*
Fat (g)	130 ± 12	137 ± 15	0.003*
Fiber (g)	32 ± 5	30 ± 5	0.318
<b>Total FODMAPs (g)</b>	41.4 ± 7.9	8.1 ± 3.5	<0.0001*
<b>Excess fructose (g)</b>	1.9 ± 0.54	0.5 ± 0.4	<0.0001*
<b>Lactose (g)</b>	28.0 ± 8.6	0.9 ± 0.3	<0.0001*
<b>Total oligosaccharides (g)</b>	8.7 ± 1.9	5.5 ± 3.2	0.001*
Fructooligosaccharides (g)	7.3 ± 1.8	4.5 ± 2.7	<0.001*
Galactooligosaccharides (g)	1.4 ± 0.3	1.0 ± 0.5	0.006*
<b>Total Polyols (g)</b>	2.9 ± 0.9	1.3 ± 0.7	<0.0001*
Sorbitol (g)	1.8 ± 0.9	0.9 ± 0.4	0.001*
Mannitol (g)	1.1 ± 0.3	0.4 ± 0.5	<0.0001*

Energy, macronutrients and fiber were calculated using FoodWorks dietary software, which is based on the Australian Food Composition tables. Total FODMAPs = excess fructose + lactose + sorbitol + mannitol + fructans + galactooligosaccharides (GOS). Bold text indicates additive constituents for total FODMAPs. Data is presented as group (n=11) mean ± standard deviation (SD) for HFOD and LFOD. \*Significance between HFOD and LFOD (P<0.05).