



EAT TO WIN

By Jan McCoy

Extension nutrition and food sciences programs are keeping up with the electronic age. For players and coaches from Pop Warner football to championship college basketball, sports nutrition is as close as the VCR.

"Winning Sports Nutrition" is a two-part videotape series designed to give athletes practical tips on nutrition for peak performance during training and competition. The tape also includes training tips from top University of Arizona coaches and athletes.

Co-produced by Linda Houtkooper, an Extension food and nutrition specialist, and Thomas Cordell, a College of Agriculture electronic media specialist, two 20-minute videotapes present a positive approach to nutrition education.

"A lot of quackery is being promoted to athletes, such as amino acid supplements touted to increase growth-hormone levels, and vitamin and mineral supplements that have no proven benefits whatsoever," Houtkooper says. "Rather than saying 'don't do this' we're showing the things we know, from a nutrition research standpoint, that work."

The tape has been purchased by educational institutions, private businesses, public health departments, sports nutrition experts and coaches. The UA basketball, volleyball and gymnastic teams have copies of the videotape. Houtkooper

said a national video distributor recently received distribution rights for marketing the tape nationally to coaches and physical education teachers.

Computer software designed to help teach 4-H youth about nutrition, exercise and physical fitness is another of Houtkooper's projects.

The Youth Fitness Check program is divided into three sections: My Diet, My Exercise Plan, and My Body and Fitness. The program queries the food, eating and exercise habits of users. The program also can be used to check physical fitness levels by measuring muscular strength, flexibility and cardiovascular endurance. Results are compared with a nationally normed data-base from the American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

The IBM-compatible software also provides an introduction to computers. Programming was done by Sharon DesRosiers of the College of Agriculture Computer Applications Group. Youth Fitness Check is now in the final stage of pilot development and has been distributed to county Extension offices throughout the state.

Houtkooper's work represents a move from the traditional role of food and nutrition in domestic education to health promotion, disease prevention and food safety.

"Extension had traditionally been focused on buying, preparing and storing food," she says. "That was

probably very appropriate a long time ago, but now, people are living longer and we're seeing more chronic diseases. The focus of our programs needs to be on how to help people be as healthy as they can be over a longer life expectancy."

Studying the motivation to exercise, and how that impacts on nutrition, is uncharted territory, Houtkooper says. Her research focuses on the interaction between nutrition and exercise.

As a co-investigator on a newly awarded grant from the National Institute of Health, Houtkooper is part of a three-year study designed to examine the effect of weight lifting on bone mineral content as a deterrent to osteoporosis. She is also a co-investigator on a project funded by the United States Olympic Committee in which she will evaluate the nutritional quality of the diets of the top five female heptathletes in the Olympic program.

"I'm interested in studying athletes because we can learn from people who push their bodies to the ultimate limit," she says. "That knowledge can be applied to people who exercise for personal fitness and to educate children and adults as well."

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—Jan McCoy