

# The quality of food choices made by military recruits during Basic Military Qualification (BMQ) in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)

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## INTRODUCTION

- The Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School (CFLRS) in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec delivers BMQ to officers joining the CAF.
- During BMQ, recruits have specific nutritional and energy needs related to the high training load.
- Studies have identified some eating habits in military personnel including an increased consumption of foods high in sugar and a suboptimal intake of fruits and vegetables (1-3).
- Considering that an adequate nutritional intake of key nutrients is essential to maintain optimal physical and mental performance, it is important to understand the food choices of recruits (4-5).

## OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the proportion of recruits who selected a healthier entrée option at breakfast, lunch and dinner during two days of BMQ at the CFLRS cafeteria.

## METHODS

- The quantitative data was previously collected at CFLRS in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec during BMQ in September 2021 using **meal food photography** (6) and a **snack questionnaire**.
- The quality of food choices of **33 recruits** was evaluated in reference to the 2019 Canadian Food Guide and the CAF Food Service standards
- The CAF Food Service standards are tailored to the nutritional requirements of the military population (7).



- Healthier entrée options were established by the National Standardized Cycle Menu (NSCM) developed by the Strat J4 Food Services\* (7).
- Healthier entrées must contain :
  - ≤ 15 g of fat
  - ≤ 5 g of saturated fat
  - ≤ 10 g of unsaturated fat
  - ≤ 600 mg of sodium
  - Maximum of 400 kcal per portion



\*The CAF Food Service standards have been revised since the completion of data analysis. The National Standardized Cycle Menu is now entitled the CAF Menu.

## RESULTS

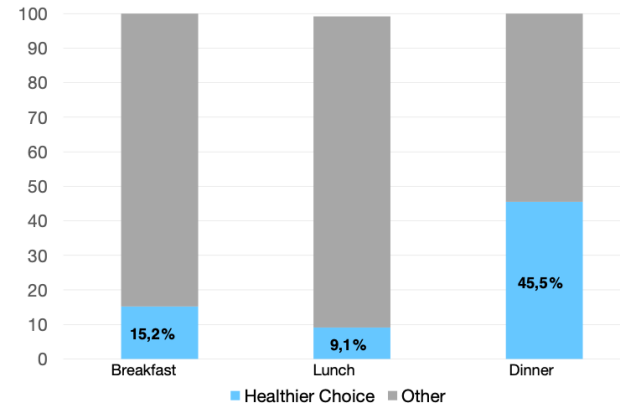


Figure 1: Percentage of recruits who selected the healthier entrée option at breakfast, lunch and dinner (n=33) for a period of two days

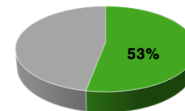


Figure 2: Percentage of meal consumed by recruits who selected the healthier entrée option at lunch (n=3)

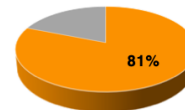


Figure 3: Percentage of meal consumed by recruits who selected the healthier entrée option at dinner (n=15)

## CONCLUSION

- During 2 days of BMQ, recruits did not select the healthier entrée options frequently.
- The healthier entrée options were not popular at breakfast and lunch and gained in popularity at dinner time.
- The results can be explained by many factors previously identified in the literature (8-10):
  - The **schedule** may cause recruits to make quick and less healthy choices
  - The **timing of trainings**
  - The desire for **optimal physical performance**.

## SIGNIFICANCE

- These preliminary findings point to an opportunity to develop strategies to help recruits make healthier food choices during BMQ to support optimal mental and physical performance.

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