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1-21-2015

# Barriers to Exercise and Nutrition for Special Olympics Athletes

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## Recommended Citation

Kwok, Alyssa; Leahy, Danielle; McLaren, John; Meserve, Christopher; Miller, Joseph; Trejos, Sierra; Wade, Jacqueline; Frisbie, Mike; Langevin, Chris; and Contompasis, Stephen, "Barriers to Exercise and Nutrition for Special Olympics Athletes" (2015). *Public Health Projects, 2008-present*. 216.

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## Introduction

### Problem

- People with **intellectual disability (ID)** have higher rates of **obesity**.
- **Special Olympics Vermont (SOVT)** athletes compete in sports events throughout the year.
  - Athletes may **lose fitness** between seasons.
  - Their **nutrition habits** remain **unknown**.
  - **Barriers** to exercise and nutrition remain **unknown**.

### Goal

- We were tasked with designing a successful **exercise and nutrition program** for SOVT athletes.

## Methods

To make **recommendations** on how to design a successful **exercise and nutrition program** for SOVT athletes, we needed data on:

- Habits
- Awareness
- Barriers
- Motivating factors



### Solution

- We conducted an interview-based **survey** of 59 SOVT athletes.
- **Participants** were ≥18 years old and recruited at a state-wide soccer tournament.
- **IRB-approved** protocol required verbal consent.
- **BMI** was calculated from height and weight.

## Results

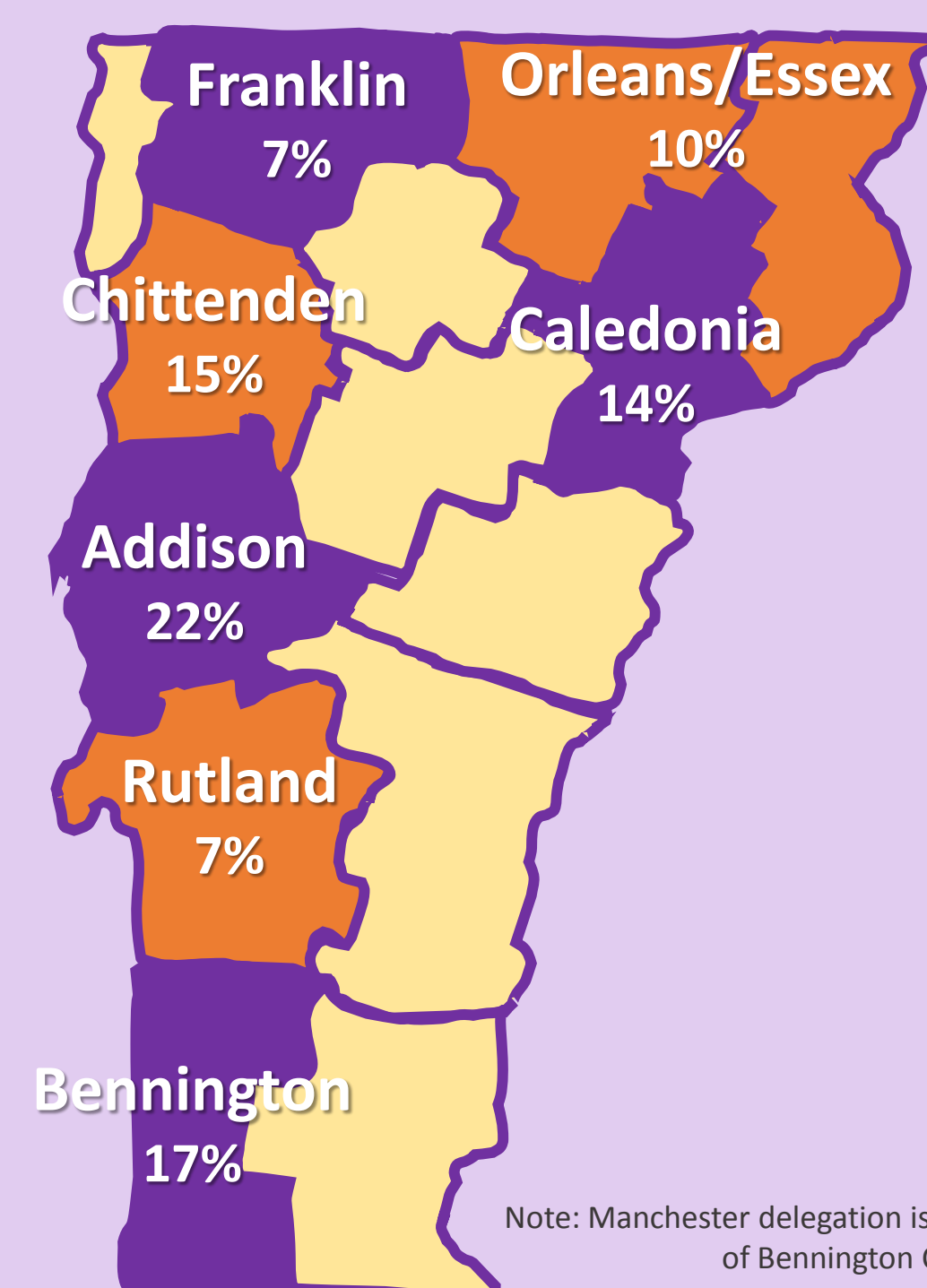
	Age (yrs)	BMI
<b>Females</b> (n=23)	31 ± 8	30 ± 8
<b>Males</b> (n=36)	27 ± 8	27 ± 5

Values expressed as means ± SD.

*"Eating healthy makes me who I am."*

- Special Olympics Vermont athlete

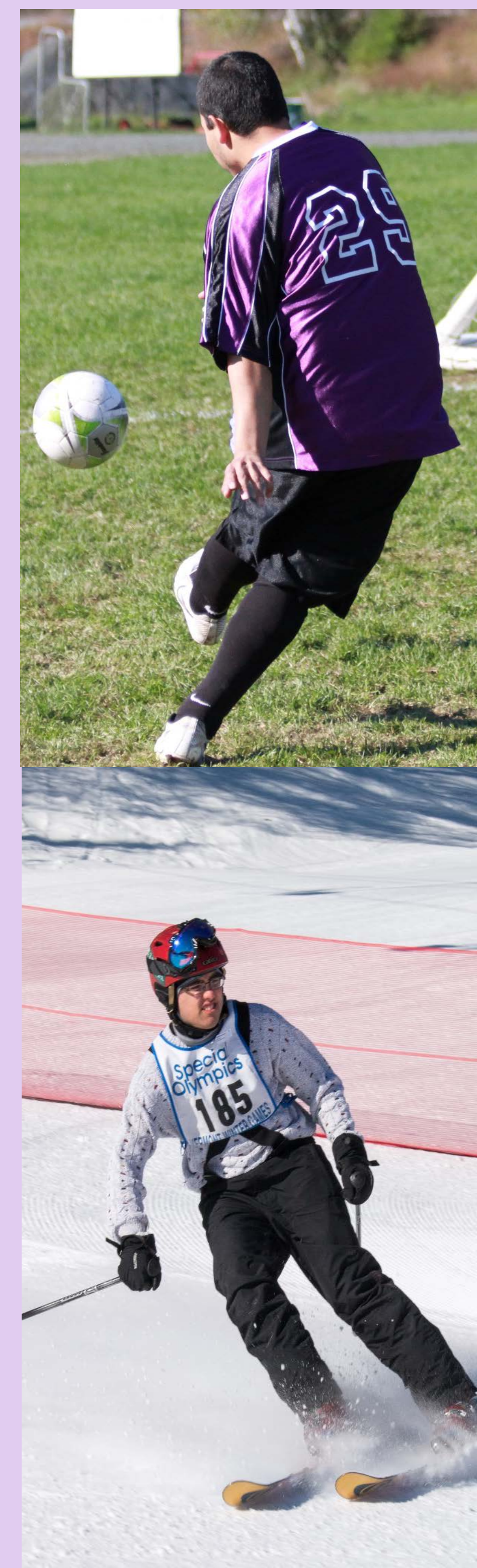
### Vermont Delegations



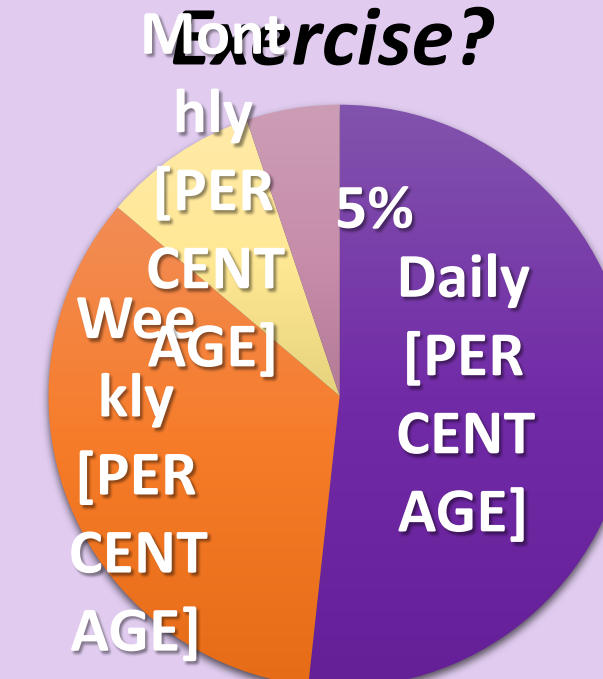
### What do you like to do for exercise?



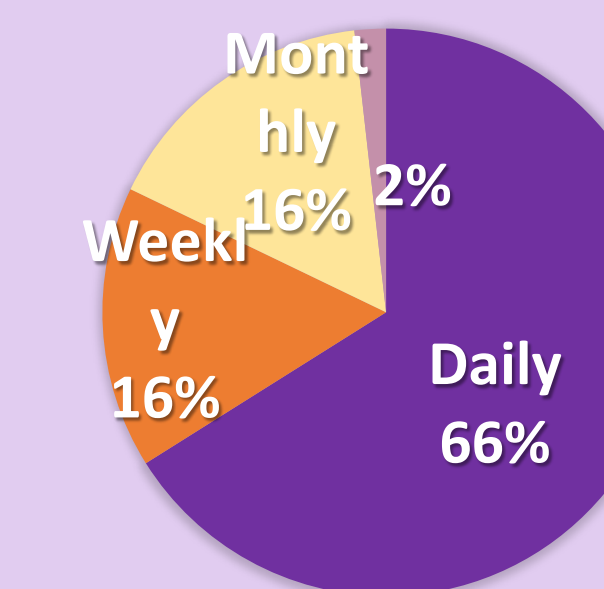
### What healthy foods do you like to eat?



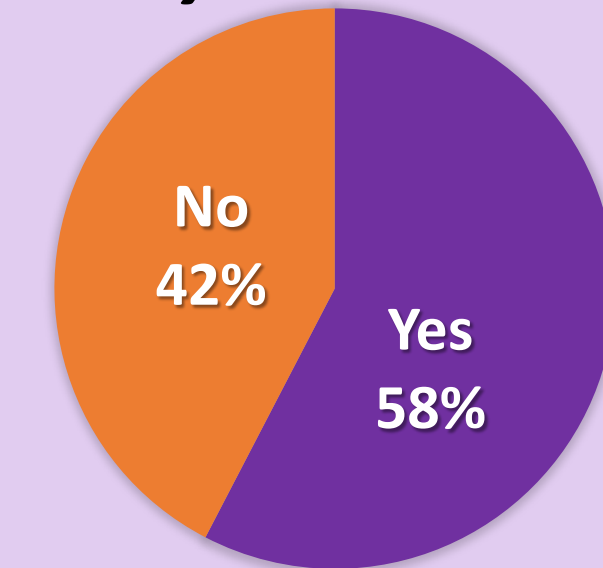
### How often do you:



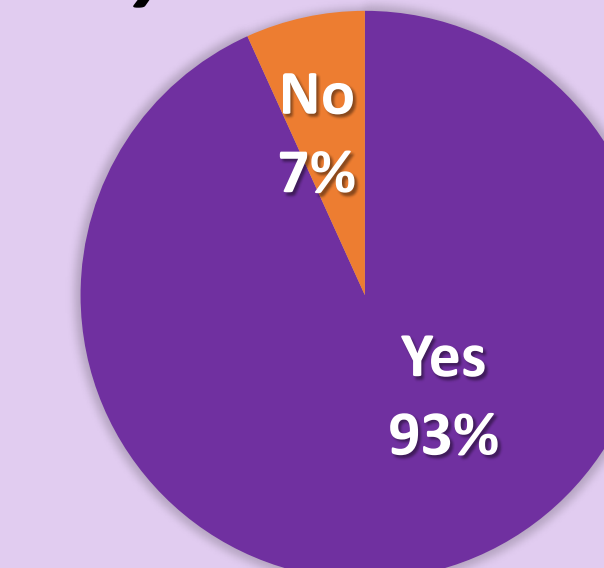
### Have a healthy meal?



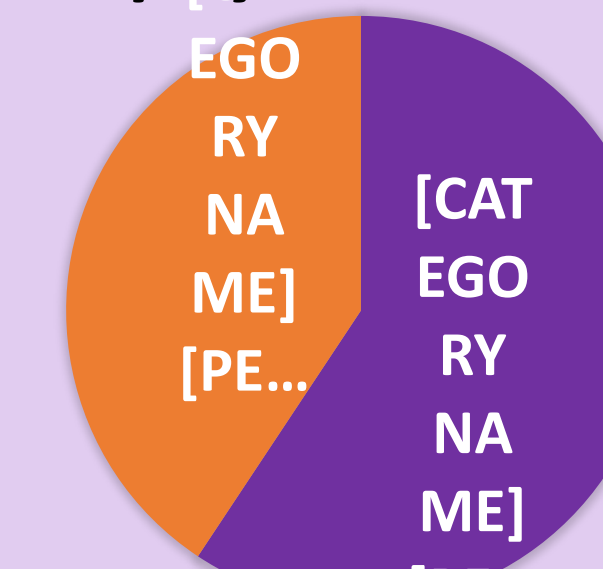
### Do you have a place to exercise:



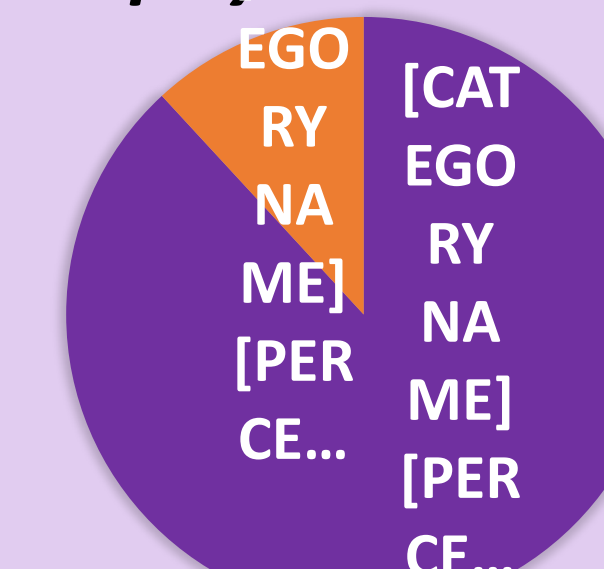
### In your community?



### Do you have someone that:

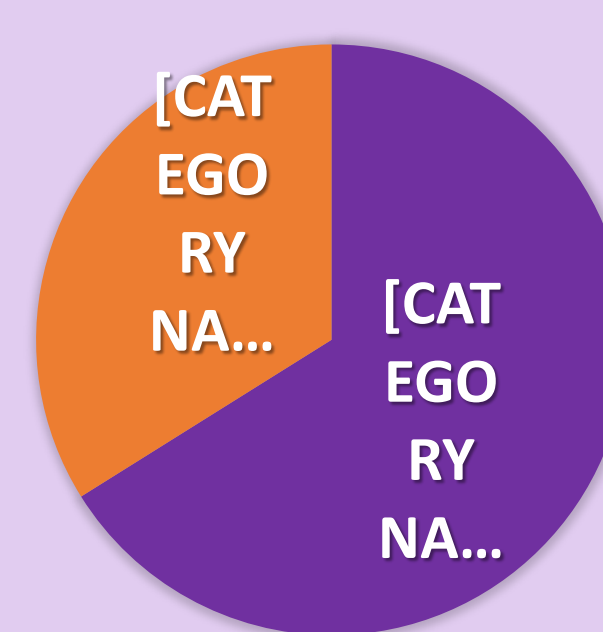


### Helps you eat healthy?

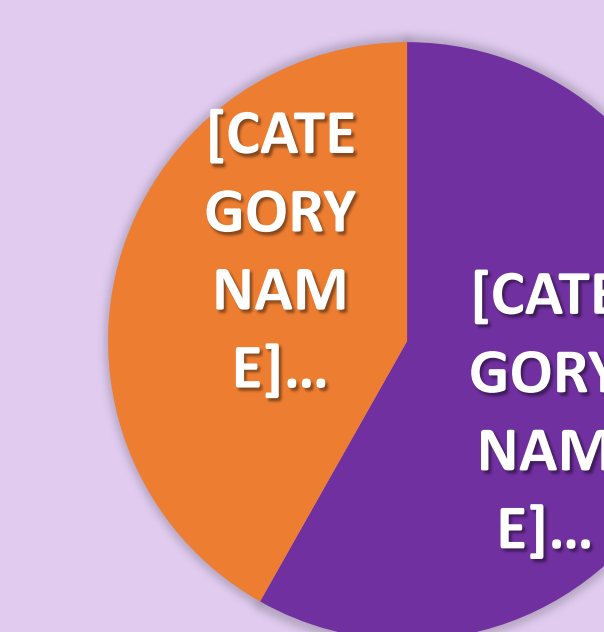


### In the past year, has anyone given you information:

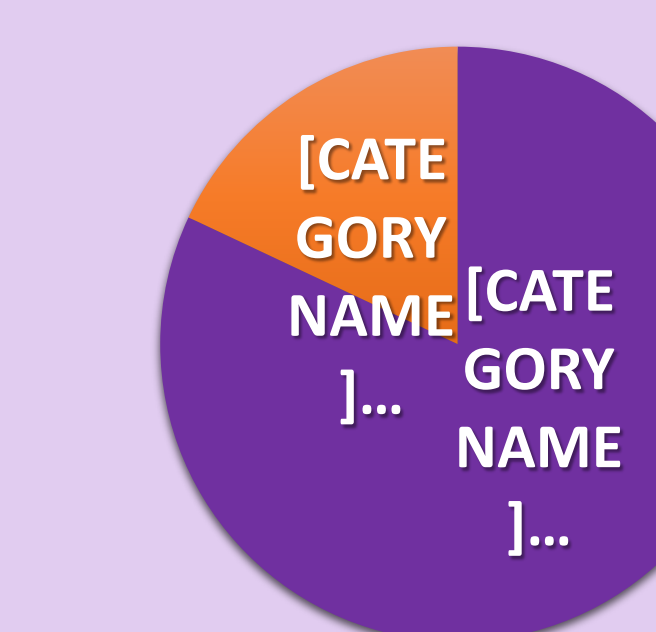
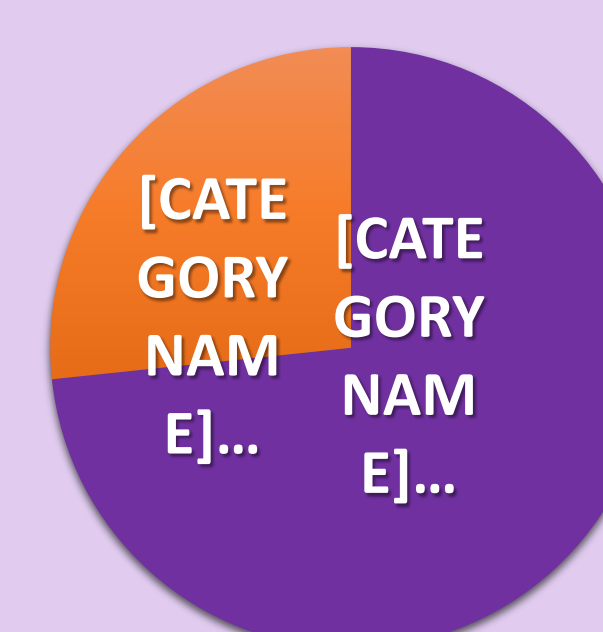
#### Teaching you how to exercise?



#### Teaching you how to eat healthy?



### Would you like more information:



## Discussion

- **Limitations** include small sample size and selection bias.
- Even in our sample of soccer athletes, **70%** had BMIs that fell within the **overweight or obese** ranges.
- **Lifestyle interventions** should be based upon **reported** barriers and strengths—not county income or population size, which did not correlate with BMI.

**Not a Problem** ↔ **Problem!**

- ✓ Access to primary care
- ✓ Adaptive equipment
- ✓ Someone to help with eating healthy

- ✓ Feeling included
- ✓ Time with teammates
- ✓ Healthy meal
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Information
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Someone to help with exercise

## Recommendations

### SOVT Program

- **Inclusion**
  - Family
  - Team
- **Accessibility**
  - Home
  - Information
- **Lifestyle changes**
  - Simple modifications
- **Motivation**
  - Incentives

### Future Research

- **Inclusion**
  - Community
- **Accessibility**
  - Transportation
- **Motivation**

*"If SOVT developed a plan, would you want to try it?"*

97% Yes!

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to SOVT, Dr. Stephen Contompasis, Chris Langevin, Mike Frisbie, Alan Howard, Dr. Tom Delaney, and Dr. Jan Carney.