



Eating Disorders in Athletes

- Significant problems in the worlds of ballet, skating, gymnastics, running, swimming, rowing, horse racing, ski jumping, riding and wrestling
- Studies suggest that participants in sports that emphasize appearance and lean bodies are at a high risk for developing eating disorders
- One study in 700 male and female athletes found the following:
 - 33% were preoccupied with food
 - 25% binge-ate at least once a week
 - 15% felt they were overweight when they are not
 - 12% feared or did lose control when they ate
 - 5% ate until feeling nauseated
 - 6% vomited after a binge
 - 6% abused laxatives or enemas
 - 12% fasted for 24 hours or more

Information modified from online site: anred.org

Signs of Exercise Addiction

- Training even when injured or tired
- Working out several times a day
- Obsessing about training details
- Feeling angry or threatened when routine is interrupted
- Canceling or avoiding social activities and other responsibilities in order to exercise

- Creating a daily schedule around working out
- Repeated comments about being fat or feeling fat
- Feeling anxiety and guilt when unable to exercise
- Happiness reliant on productivity of workout

Dedicated vs. Compulsive

- The dedicated athlete is a person who does quality exercise to improve athletic performance.
- The compulsive exerciser pushes him/herself to do excessive amounts of exercise—he/she exercises for penance rather than fitness usually to “undue” or make up for something. Main goal is to burn calories as opposed to having fun and improving health and fitness.

Effects of Eating Disorders in Athletes

- Eating Disorders may result in symptoms which interfere with athletic performance.
- Fatigue, weakness, light-headedness, broken bones, leg cramps and irregular or heart rate are among the symptoms which may impair athletic capacity.
- Females are likely to experience amenorrhea (lack of menses), disordered eating and osteoporosis, a combination often referred to as the Female Athlete Triad.

Detection and Treatment of Eating Disorders in Athletes

- Athletes are often aware of the symptoms of eating disorders but fearful of acknowledging the symptoms for fear that they will be required to stop their sport.

- Coaches are often in a key position to both recognize and assist the athlete in seeking appropriate treatment.
- It is important to be aware of the warning signs.
- Help the athlete identify and contact an eating disorder specialist for a professional screening. If the athlete denies the problem, consult a trained clinician and review the situation
- Focus on the evidence and what the athlete is able to tell you regarding his or her feelings. Talk about the fears the athlete may have about being removed from the team or losing a scholarship.

How Coaches Prevent Eating Disorders

- Understanding and recognizing warning signs
- Provide athletes with accurate information regarding weight loss, body composition, nutrition, and sport performance.
- Emphasize the health risks of low weight
- De-emphasize weight by not weighing athletes and by minimizing (eliminating) comments about weight. Instead, focus on other areas in which athletes have more control in order to improve performance (i.e. focus on strength, physical conditioning and mental and emotional components of performance).
- Do not assume that reducing body fat or weight will enhance performance
- Understand why weight is such a sensitive and personal issue
- Take eating disorder behaviors seriously. There is a 10-15% mortality and 25% suicide rate for those with eating disorders.