

Eating Disorders in Sport

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Types of eating disorders

The DSM-5 currently recognizes three separate eating disorder diagnoses:

- **Anorexia Nervosa**: restriction of food, extremely low body weight, intense fear of gaining weight, and body image disturbance
- **Bulimia Nervosa**: recurrent episodes of binge eating, use of inappropriate compensatory behaviors (i.e., purging and fasting), and self-evaluation unduly influenced by body shape and weight
- **Binge Eating Disorder**: episodes of binge eating, loss of control over eating, feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or disgust, and potentially eating alone to hide the behavior

In addition to these three eating disorders, Sundgot-Borgen (1993) proposed ***Anorexia Athletica***, a disorder found specifically in female athletes. Anorexia Athletica is characterized by symptoms similar to anorexia nervosa, but in sub-clinical severity, such as weight loss greater than 5% of expected body weight, excessive exercise or training, irregular menses, body image issues, and the use of compensatory behaviors, such as vomiting and laxative use.

Athletes and eating disorders

Falling short of the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for eating disorders does not necessarily mean that the individual has a healthy relationship with food or their weight. Athletes can display disordered eating patterns without meeting the full criteria for an eating disorder, which can affect an athlete's health. Athletes may be at a higher risk of developing eating disorders, with studies of collegiate athletes showing clinical eating disorder rates of up to 5.7% (females) and 1% (males) and subclinical rates of up to 25.5% in females (female) and 19.2% in males (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2012).

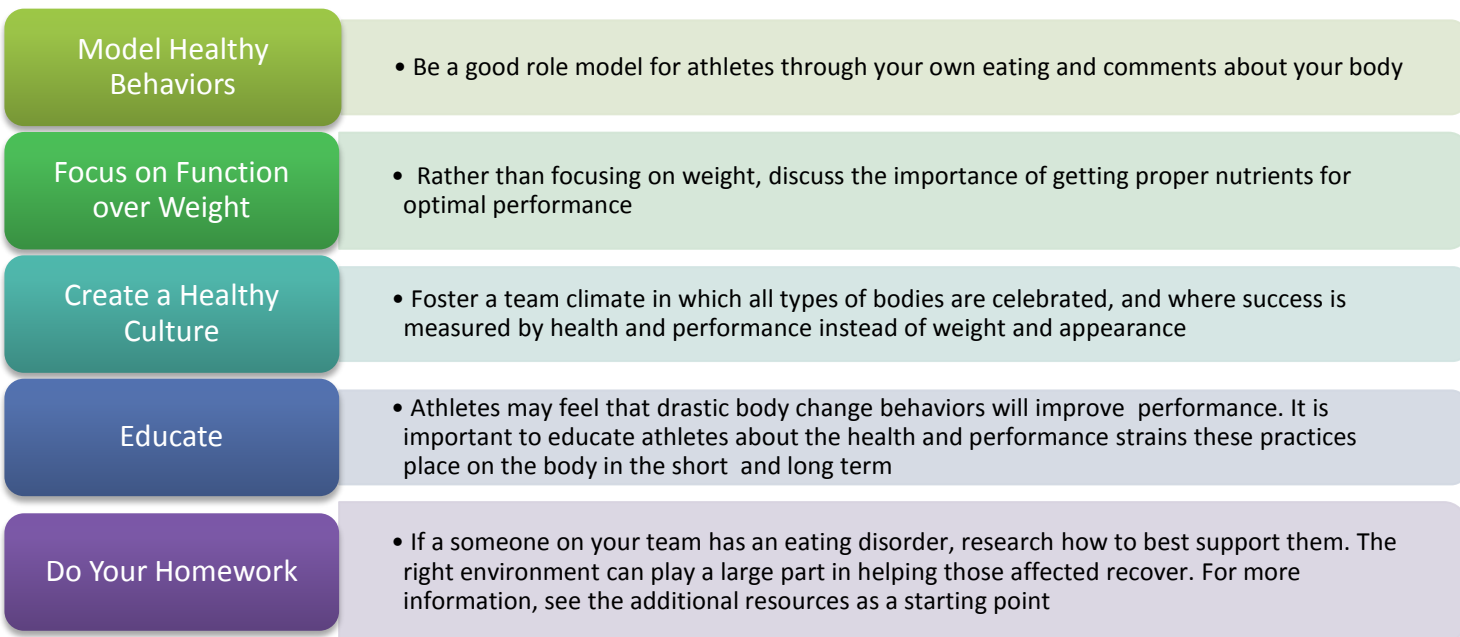
Athletes may be at risk for disordered eating or eating disorders because of the task (ideal weight for physique or performance) and social (coaches, peers, and parents) pressures present in the athletic environment (Thompson & Sherman, 2010). Sports that use weight classifications to divide competitor groups (i.e., wrestling and boxing) encourage unhealthy weight control behaviors. Also, coaches and athletes are more likely to focus on weight control to reach unrealistic and unhealthy weights and shapes in sports where lower body fat can lead to better performance, and/or in which physical attractiveness is considered important to success (i.e., gymnastics, diving, and figure skating). Unfortunately, coaches and parents can knowingly or unknowingly exert pressure on athletes to lose weight through critical comments about body shape and weight.

Physiological consequences of eating disorders on health and performance



(NEDA, 2015; Mountjoy et al., 2014)

Tips for helping athletes maintain a healthy body image and relationship with food



Tips adapted from Voelker (2015).

Where can I learn more about eating disorders in sport?

Mountjoy, M., Sundgot-Borgen, J., Burke, L., Carter, S., Constantini, N., Lebrun, C., ... & Ljungqvist, A. (2014). The IOC consensus statement: Beyond the female athlete triad—Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S). *British journal of sports medicine, 48*(7), 491-497.

National Eating Disorder Association Toolkits: <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/toolkits>

Petrie, T. A., & Greenleaf, C. (2012). Eating disorders in sport. In S. Murphy (Ed.), *Handbook of sport and performance psychology* (1st ed.). NY: Oxford University Press.

Sundgot-Borgen, J. (1993). Prevalence of eating disorders in elite female athletes. *International journal of sport nutrition, 3*(1), 29-40.

Thompson, R. A., & Sherman, R. T. (2011). *Eating disorders in sport*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The Victory Program at McCallum Place: <http://www.mccallumplace.com/the-victory-program.html>

Voelker, D. (2015) Disordered eating in student-athletes: Understanding the basics and what we can do about it. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/nutrition-and-performance/disordered-eating-student-athletes-understanding-basics>.

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