



Eating Disorders in Athletes

Eating disorders are a problem that some coaches may never see, recognize, or have personal experience with, but this illness is out there. Coaches must be aware because your actions and statements can inadvertently make a dangerous situation worse. Read on.

Two types of eating disorders are commonly talked about:

- Anorexia Nervosa- A serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.
- Bulimia Nervosa – Characterized by binge eating followed by purging, diet pills and/or laxative abuse, or excess exercising.

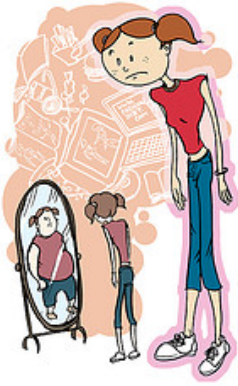
Recently another type of eating disorder is being recognized. This sickness is called anorexia athletica. This is when a person works out excessively due to a perception of never achieving full satisfaction. The person is always looking for the next big thing, and when they fulfill that they move on to the next thing quickly without feeling accomplished.

Coaches who are responsible for women's athletics and men's wrestling or x-country should pay close attention to their athletes. A casual comment like, "you'd shave a few seconds off your time if you lost 10 pounds" can easily push an at-risk athlete from a potential to an actual eating disorder.

Approximately 90% of reported eating disorders in athletics are in women, but men are less likely to report an eating disorder. Most people with eating disorders exhibit a general personality that includes extreme perfectionism and extremely high self-expectation. Also, coaches should be aware that disordered eating behavior is usually highly secretive. PLEASE FOLLOW THE LINK BELOW TO SEE A LIST OF SIGNS/SYMPTOMS - YOUR AWARENESS MAY SOME DAY PREVENT A TRAGEDY.

Factors that influence eating disorders

- Social (including athletic/coach) pressure to be "thin" ...BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY!
- High demand to have a low body fat percentage
- To make a certain weight to compete in wrestling
- Depression: person may not be able to see themselves in a positive way



A common symptom of eating disorders is the inability to appropriately perceive themselves...so even skeletal anorexics see fat in the mirror.

Things that can be done if you suspect an eating disorder

- Emphasize eating healthy so they have the energy they need to be effective in their sport.
- Promote healthy weight loss if the person is set on losing pounds. Send them to a professional with experience in nutrition and exercise prescription.
- Create an atmosphere where they feel comfortable about their current health. Many people (especially adolescents...and not just those with eating disorders!) are sensitive about their body image.
- Approach the athlete with a concern, and suggest they see a guidance counselor or someone with professional experience dealing with these issues. You may need to follow up on this.

[Athletes and Eating Disorders](#) [Signs and Symptoms of Eating Disorders](#)