



SUCCESSFUL SPORTS PARENTING

Facts about Disordered Eating

Condensed from the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation, Inc. Fact Sheet

An eating disorder is a symptom of underlying emotional distress. The two most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, both of which are self-destructive eating behaviors and can be life-threatening.

Anorexia nervosa is characterized by a pursuit of thinness, while bulimia nervosa is characterized by secretive binge-eating episodes (abnormal eating behaviors) followed by self-induced vomiting, fasting or use of laxatives.

Athletes participating in all sports are susceptible to eating disorders, but it is found in some sports more often than others. Athletes more at risk of having eating disorders are ballet dancers, gymnasts, cheerleaders, figure skaters, divers, wrestlers, and swimmers.

Athletes who diet at an early age and those whose diet is unsupervised are particularly at risk. Some warning signs of eating disorders are:

- repeated comments about being fat and questions such as, "Do you think I am fat?"
- below average or excessive and rapid weight loss
- reluctance to eat with a group
- secretive eating
- visits to the restroom immediately following eating, or long stays in the restroom (for purging)
- bloodshot eyes, especially after being in the restroom or other place where vomiting could have occurred
- odor of vomit
- weight fluctuations
- light-headedness or loss of balance
- mood swings
- excessive physical activity that is not part of the training regimen.

Sometimes eating disorders can be triggered by a single comment from someone very important to the athlete. An off-handed remark that refers to an athlete as "pudgy" or "thunder thighs" can become deeply imbedded in the mind of a potential anorexic or bulimic.

Coaches and parents need to be sensitive to the role they play in focusing undue attention on weight and body image.

Coaches alone have very little control in helping cure an athlete with an eating disorder.

Team planning that involves the coach, parents and health-care provider is valuable in determining how and when to approach an athlete, how to assess the situation and what resources should be used to provide treatment.



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Posting a list of local resources (with tear-off phone numbers at the bottom) in locker rooms, bathrooms and dining halls will enable the athlete to find help they need.

Don't deal with the problem alone. A medical team approach to treating eating disorders is recommended which includes parents, coaches, physicians, trainers, sports nutritionists and psychologists who work together to provide helpful information, guidance and support in sport nutrition programs.