

Eating Disorders: The Facts

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Adolescence is the most at-risk group of developing an eating disorder (Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, disordered eating). Female athletes are twice as likely to develop an ED in their lifetime over male athletes.

Why?

- Adolescence is a period of intense change both physically and psychologically, which can lead to stress, confusion, anxiety and insecurity.
- Adolescents undergo rapid physical transformations, which often lead to feeling self-conscious, a low self-esteem, and making physical comparisons amongst peers.
- Athletes are at a high risk of developing an eating disorder due to the competitive nature of sport and the large focus on weight and body composition.

DIETING

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Dieting is the single most important risk factor for developing an eating disorder (ED).

- Girls who diet moderately are 5x more likely to develop and ED than those who don't diet.
- Girls who diet severely are 18x more like to develop an ED.
- 95% of women have been on a diet by the age of 19.

ALARMING BEHAVIOURS

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WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Obsessive calorie counting, food logging.
- Regular weighing, obsessive focus on appearance.
- Regular dieting – interest in fad diets or quick fixes for weight loss.
- Recently vegetarian or vegan.
- Withdrawn from friends avoiding social situations.
- More then normal stress levels.



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EFFECT ON PERFORMANCE

- Low energy levels.
- Poor concentration.
- Stress and anxiety caused by perfectionism and unrealistic expectations.
- Increased risk of injuries (low bone density, delayed healing)
- Low immunity.
- Loss of social interaction with group.

WHAT TO DO

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR CHILD OR STUDENT?

- Speak to their coach, teacher, parents and friends. Have they noticed these behaviours too?
- Voice your concerns.
- Refer to psychologist, school counsellor and dietitian!

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS

- Avoid labelling foods as 'good' and 'bad'. This can lead to feelings of guilt and shame after eating 'bad' foods.
- Avoid using food as bribes, punishment or rewards.
- Avoid regular comments on appearance and weight. Physical appearance is not a measure of value and self worth.
- Encourage eating to hunger. Do not force your child to eat everything on the plate.
- Encourage your child to express their feelings freely and encourage open communication.
- Help your child develop a critical awareness of images and messages seen on TV, social media, magazines.
- Don't criticise or tease children about their appearance, or make comparisons to another child's appearance.
- Do NOT provide or recommend rigid and restrictive diet plans.
- Avoid weighing (unless needed for hydration testing).
- Do NOT set weight loss goals or targets.
- Focus on health and nutrition rather than on weight and shape outcomes.

USEFUL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS



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