

When Eating Good Goes Bad

Disordered Eating and Athletics

A fine line between eating healthy and disordered eating

Eating healthy for peak performance takes discipline and diligence. But sometimes this discipline can actually get in the way of fueling-up properly for your sport. "Good" eating or healthy eating can sometimes go bad.

Athletes are at higher risk for developing an eating disorder or having disordered eating. You don't have to be diagnosed with an eating disorder (such as anorexia or bulimia) to have eating patterns that compromise your performance. For example, minimizing carbohydrates as a runner could become disordered eating because adequate carbohydrates are the vital to maintain performance. Eliminating fat from your diet, with the thinking that "fat makes us fat" can decrease performance while simultaneously increasing your risk for injury. This could also be considered a disordered eating behavior.

The good news for athletes is that eating disorders can be prevented. Having a well balanced diet (one that includes wiggle-room for the occasional cookie or favorite food), satisfying energy needs, and avoiding restrictive diets all work together to prevent the onset of eating disorders. If you don't know how to determine your energy needs or what a balanced diet means, consult a Sports Dietitian. If you are unsure whether or not you have an eating disorder, talk to a friend, parent, coach or healthcare provider.

Having enough energy available (from food) during exercise is a top nutrition goal for athletes. Performance will suffer when an athlete has too much energy going out (through exercise, potentially overtraining) and not enough coming in (through food).

The following are consequences of inadequate fueling:

- The body will use muscle for fuel, decreasing the metabolism. Losing muscle mass translates to experiencing a loss in strength and endurance.
- Immune function will be compromised, making athletes more prone to illnesses.
- Recovery becomes almost impossible, leading to an increased risk of both injury and fatigue.

As athletes we have special needs. Do not compare your intake with the intake of others. You are an athlete; therefore, you need more fuel than your non-athlete friends.

Having such a serious focus on being thin and under-fueling your body will be sure to take the fun out of your sport. Staying fueled like an athlete should will help you be stronger, faster, and smarter... the traits of winners.



**Energy Deficit /
Eating Disorder**

**Female
Athlete
Triad**

**Menstrual
Disturbance
Amenorrhea**

**Bone Loss
Osteoporosis**

In female athletes, an energy deficit may be seen in the form of the Female Athlete Triad (Triad) which refers to the relationship between low energy availability (which may or may not be intentional), loss of menstrual periods, and bone loss. The health related consequences of the triad, such as osteoporosis, can be devastating and even end a young person's athletic career. For more information about screening, prevention, and treatment of the triad, go to www.femaleathletetriad.org.

Athletes with the highest risk are those involved in sports that have specific weight requirements or emphasize having a particular appearance. A few examples include: gymnastics, figure skating, diving, rowing, swimming, running, wrestling, and football.

Eating disorders do not discriminate. They can occur in both men and women, at any age, at any socio-economic level, and to any ethnicity, especially in cultures that place more value on having a thin body type. No one is immune to believing the false messages our media constantly projects about our bodies and what the media thinks we should look like. Eating disorders can be life threatening. If you or someone you know has abnormal eating, talk about it today!

Remember: Dieting can lead to disordered eating. Stay strong and don't diet. EAT TO WIN!

If being a certain body type seems more important to you than your performance, check out the following for more information:

- National Eating Disorders Association
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
- www.femaleathletetriad.org
- Momentum Nutrition and Fitness, Seattle.
www.momentum4health.com
- www.something-fishy.org

Questions to consider if you think you might have disordered eating or an eating disorder

- 1. Do you drink a lot of tea or coffee, energy drinks, eat a lot of candy or gum, smoke, and/or take caffeine pills as an attempt to control appetite and/or feel more energetic?**
- 2. Do you weigh yourself often? Does the number on the scale dictate your mood and/or self-worth for the day? Do you spend a lot of time worrying about your weight?**
- 3. Would you worry about a friend or family member that came to you using similar weight-loss methods or eating habits?**
- 4. Do you spend a lot of time cooking for others, reading recipes and/or studying the nutritional information on food (calories, fat grams, etc.)?**
- 5. Do you eliminate certain groups of food based on information you read in a magazine or heard from a teammate?**

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you may be at risk for an eating disorder. Please contact your health care provider and talk with them about your answers to the questions above.