



SPEED PROJECT

Sport & Prevention of Emerging Eating Disorders

Warning Signs How to Recognize the Presence of an Eating Disorder in an Athlete

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Groups at higher risk of eating problems:

- adolescents, particularly females;
- athletes who practice sports where weight is closely linked to performance;
- people with low self-esteem;
- people from families with high expectations regarding performance and physical appearance;
- people who suffer from anxiety and depression;
- perfectionistic individuals.



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The warning signs that can be observed fall into three categories:

- physical;
- psychological;
- behavioral.



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Physical Signs:

- rapid weight loss or frequent weight fluctuations;
- increased sensitivity to cold;
- damaged teeth, swollen cheeks, calluses on knuckles;
- fainting or dizziness;
- frequent feelings of fatigue;
- loss of menstrual cycle.



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Behavioral Signs:

- dieting;
- excessive or compulsive exercise;
- avoidance of situations involving food;
- frequent use of the bathroom, especially after eating;
- changes in clothing style (wearing loose clothes);
- excessive sensitivity to comments about body, weight, and eating;
- changes in eating habits, identification of forbidden foods.



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Psychological Signs:

- having a distorted body image;
- increased preoccupation with food, weight, and body image;
- changes in psychological state, anxiety, and mood;
- rigid thinking about food;
- feeling of loss of control regarding food;
- using food as comfort or as punishment.



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Specific Physical Symptoms in Athletes:

- reduction in concentration, energy, muscle function, coordination, endurance, and speed;
- an increase in fatigue and greater perceived effort;
- reduced training response and longer recovery times after training, matches, or competitions;
- frequent muscle strains, sprains, or fractures (often due to overload);
- slow heart rate and low blood pressure;
- abdominal pain or gastrointestinal disturbances;
- joint swelling/pain;
- more frequent overheating and dehydration.



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Specific Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms in Athletes:

- retirement or reduced interaction with coaches/teammates;
- difficulty taking rest days or gradually reducing training;
- avoidance of or excessive intake of water;
- comparison of food intake, weight, shape, size, or training routines;
- additional or prolonged training beyond what is required (e.g., sit-ups, laps, or extra workouts)
- training in dangerous situations, such as when injured, ill, or alone at night;
- high anxiety or guilt when unable to train;
- reports of concern from teammates about the individual.



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