

Disordered Eating in Athletes

Eating Disorder vs. Disordered Eating

- Eating Disorder: one of the three clinically diagnosable conditions – anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or eating disorder not otherwise specified (EDNOS)
- Disordered Eating: abnormal and harmful eating behaviors that are used in a misguided attempt to lose weight or maintain a lower than normal body weight

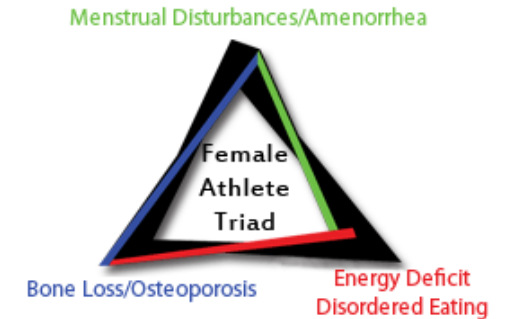
Signs & Symptoms of Disordered Eating

Behavioral	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive criticism of one's body weight or shape • Preoccupation with food, calories, or weight • Compulsive, excessive exercise • Mood swings, irritability • Depression • Social withdrawal • Secretly eating or stealing food • Bathroom visits after eating • Avoiding food-related social activities • Excessive use of laxatives, diuretics, or diet pills • Consumption of large amounts of food inconsistent with the athlete's weight • Excessive fear of being overweight or becoming fat that does not diminish as weight loss continues • Preoccupation with the dietary patterns and eating behaviors of other people • Lack of concern for excessive weight loss or extremely low body weight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic fatigue • Noticeable weight loss or gain • Anemia • Frequent gastrointestinal problems or complaints (e.g. excessive gas, abdominal bloating, constipation, ulcers) • Cold intolerance • Lanugo (fine hair on the face and body) • Tooth erosion • Calloused fingers • Frequent musculoskeletal injuries (particularly stress fractures) • Delayed or prolonged healing of wounds or injuries • Prolonged healing of wounds or injuries • Frequent or prolonged illnesses • Dry skin and hair • Brittle nails • Alopecia (hair loss) • In women, irregular or absent menstrual cycles

What is The Female Athlete Triad?

The Female Athlete Triad is a syndrome of three interrelated conditions that exist on a continuum of severity, including:

- Energy Deficit/Disordered Eating
- Menstrual Disturbances/Amenorrhea
- Bone Loss/Osteoporosis



What causes The Triad?

Energy Deficit/Disordered Eating

The primary cause of the Female Athlete Triad is energy deficiency, an imbalance between the amount of energy consumed and the amount of energy expended during exercise. Usually this involves a conscious restriction of food intake, problems with body image and a high drive for thinness.

Menstrual Disturbances/Amenorrhea

The most serious menstrual problem associated with the Triad is amenorrhea, defined as no menstrual period for 3 months or more. However, athletes who have irregular menstrual cycles are also susceptible to the effects of the Triad.

Bone Loss/Osteoporosis

Women with the triad are at higher risk for low bone mass which can lead to weakened bones, a condition called osteoporosis in its severe form. This type of bone loss can cause an increased risk of fractures, including stress fractures.

What should I do if I have disordered eating or know a teammate with disordered eating?

As an athlete:

- If female, monitor your menstrual cycle by using a diary or calendar.
- Consult your physician if you have menstrual irregularities or have recurrent injuries or stress fractures.
- Seek counseling if you suspect you are overly concerned about your body image.
- Consult a sport nutritionist to help you design an appropriate diet.
- Seek emotional support from parents, coaches and teammates.

As a teammate:

- If unsure how to approach the situation, talk to a coach you trust.
- Remain calm and talk honestly with your friend about her/his behavior and its consequences.
- Don't argue or try to control your friend's behavior regarding food.
- Try to maintain a healthy atmosphere in the dorm, at practice and to include your friend in group activities.
- Encourage new interests and leisure activities that your friend enjoys.