



SUNN IDRETT

Information for parents

Sports and eating disorders.

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We have to ensure healthy athletes stay healthy!



HEALTHY SPORT is a field of priority within the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports aiming to reduce the incidence of eating disorders among young athletes and to ensure healthy athletes stay healthy.

The target group is athletes aged 13 to 18 years and their coaches, parents and support systems.

Eating disorders and sports

Athletes are considered high risk for developing eating disorders. This especially applies to athletes in sports that focus on being slim or having a certain weight, such as sports based on endurance, weight classes and aesthetics.

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders involve having a difficult or disturbed relationship to your own body, body weight, food and emotions.

There are different types and severities of eating disorders. The two main types are **anorexia nervosa** (anorexia) and **bulimia nervosa** (bulimia), but the majority of people with eating disorders are categorised as having **unspecific eating disorders**.

It can be difficult to determine if a person has an eating disorder based on how they look. Most people with problems have a normal body weight. Some are skinny, and others are overweight.

Focus on body weight and a correct diet is a normal part of an athlete's life. The line between normal and unhealthy is often unclear. This makes it hard for people around them to know if there is a reason for concern.

It is possible to overcome an eating disorder with a lot of personal effort and motivation, especially if the problems are confronted early on. It is important that the youth has a strong support network and someone to reach out to. It is also important for you as a parent or a guardian to educate yourself about eating disorders.

What should you be looking for as parents?

Watch out for the following early signs of an eating disorder:

Physical signs:

- Weight loss or weight fluctuations.
- Frequent and unexplained injuries, strain symptoms.
- Fatigue, more tired than normal when training.
- Stomach pain, nausea and feeling of fullness after eating small amounts of food.
- Low body temperature, gets cold easily.
- Absent or irregular menstruation.
- Fluffy hair in the face and, especially, on the back.
- Dull and lackluster hair.

Signs related to mood and behavior

- Excessive training – training more than normal.
- Increased mood swings.
- Sleeping difficulties, wakes up very early.
- Weigh themselves often, extreme fear of weight gain.
- Unexplained performance fluctuations.
- Low view of themselves and their body.
- Significant changes in performance at school and/or in their sport.
- Developing rigid daily routines.
- Social withdrawal, avoiding birthdays, school events, etc.

Signs related to food

- Obsessed with food.
- Collects information about dieting, calories and metabolism.
- Increased focus on healthy eating, can become preoccupied with recipes and cooking books.



- Sensitive relationship with food – sudden ‘intolerances’.
- Eating less or change of diet, for instance becoming a vegetarian.
- Nearly always choosing low calorie food.
- Changed behaviour with food – for instance cutting food into small pieces, moving it around on the plate or spreading it.
- Throws away and/or hides food in napkins, pockets, etc.
- Leaves the table during the meal or immediately after to go to their room or the bathroom. Turns on loud music, TV or tap to hide vomiting.
- Excessive or hidden eating.
- Will not accept unplanned situations related to food and meals, for instance changing meal times.

These signs in isolation do not necessarily mean your child has an eating disorder. If in doubt, please contact qualified professionals.



What do I do if I am concerned?

As an adult, it is important that you take symptoms seriously, even when you are unsure. If you have concerns, you can start by reaching out to someone you can share these with. The next step is to find someone who can help, preferably someone qualified.

Trust is essential if you are trying to help someone with problems. Openness and honesty is key. Do not go behind your child's back, but involve him or her in your thoughts and concerns.

As an adult, it is important that you maintain your role as mother, father or coach, rather than becoming a therapist. Be open and honest, and figure out what type of support and help is wanted. The most important thing is that you are supportive and express any concerns you or other people may have about the situation. It is common for a person with problems to deny there is a problem, and they may reject you.

If you need more help or information, the primary health service can also assist you with advice and guidance, and assess whether a psychologist or psychiatrist is necessary. A nutritionist can give you nutritional guidance. An interdisciplinary approach can be useful during treatment.

How can eating disorders be prevented?

In today's society, a lot of our identity is connected to achievements and success. The most important thing parents can do for their children is to confirm who they are as people, rather than what they can achieve in sports or at school. Make it clear that their personal qualities are the most important.

You are advised to also read the preventive advice from Matro on the next page and learn about dietary recommendations for young athletes. Please visit www.sunnidrett.no

9 tips from MATRO

1	Encourage a good relationship between the child and food. Parents should give a good example and show that they have a relaxed relationship with food.
2	If you have a difficult relationship with food yourself, you should try to find other venues to express this, when children are not present.
3	Avoid negative comments about food, diet and body image in front of children. They pick up more than you think, and are affected by what they hear.
4	Give children enjoyable meals with regular meal times when possible, and show them that meals are friendly and peaceful with good conversations.
5	Focus more on the meal and how enjoyable it is, rather than on the food and its ingredients.
6	Avoid talking about good and bad food. Show children that all food is ok, but in different amounts and at different times. Define what "every day food" is, as well as food for special occasions.
7	Talk about the origin, culture and taste of food rather than calories, fat and bad food.
8	Avoid statements which define the child's appearance, or compare their appearance and body shape with others.
9	Finally: Trust in the methods you use. Common sense will take you far.

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