

Identifying

signs and symptoms of eating disorders in athletes

Eating disorders among athletes can show up in many different ways.

The signs & symptoms can be classified into 4 broad categories: behavioural, physical, psychological and relating to performance. No one sign or symptom indicates an eating disorder, but a number of signs and symptoms warrants an intervention. As medical and sports professionals, it is crucial to be able to recognize the signs quickly and effectively.

BEHAVIOURAL

Obsessing over physical appearance
(comments, comparisons)

Counting calories/weighing food

Hiding body (in oversized clothing,
in layers of clothing)

Social avoidance (refusing to eat
or to change in front of others)

Food restriction (dieting, avoiding specific
food groups)

Compensatory behaviours
(skipping meals, extra training, etc.)

Hiding eating, losing control over eating

Evidence of purging (going to the bathroom
after meals)

PERFORMANCE

Frequent injuries, stress fractures

Slow recovery

Diminished or plateaued performance

Low motivation

PHYSIQUES

Weight fluctuations (rapid gain/loss)

Irregular or absent menses

**Headaches, dizziness, chills, shakiness,
fainting**

**Chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness
of breath**

Thin and brittle hair, hair loss

Dry and itchy skin

Dental erosion, dry mouth, thirst

Gastrointestinal problems (bloating, cramps,
constipation, abdominal discomfort)

Insomnia, fatigue, lack of energy

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Anxiety, depression

Rigidity, obsessive thinking

Self-harm, suicidal ideation

Difficulty concentrating, memory impairment

Body dissatisfaction (body dysmorphia)

