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Position Statements

National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Preventing, Detecting, and Managing Disordered Eating in Athletes

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Abstract

Objective: To present recommendations for the prevention, detection, and comprehensive management of disordered eating (DE) in athletes.

Background: Athletes with DE rarely self-report their symptoms. They tend to deny the condition and are often resistant to referral and treatment. Thus, screenings and interventions must be handled skillfully by knowledgeable professionals to obtain desired outcomes. Certified athletic trainers have the capacity and responsibility to play active roles as integral members of the health care team. Their frequent daily interactions with athletes help to facilitate the level of medical surveillance necessary for early detection, timely referrals, treatment follow-through, and compliance.

Recommendations: These recommendations are intended to provide certified athletic trainers and others participating in the health maintenance and performance enhancement of athletes with specific knowledge and problem-solving skills to better prevent, detect, and manage DE. The individual biological, psychological, sociocultural, and familial factors for each athlete with DE result in widely different responses to intervention strategies, challenging the best that athletics programs have to offer in terms of resources and expertise. The complexity, time intensiveness, and expense of managing DE necessitate an interdisciplinary approach representing medicine, nutrition, mental health, athletic training, and athletics administration in order to facilitate early detection and treatment, make it easier for symptomatic athletes to ask for help, enhance the potential for full recovery, and satisfy medicolegal requirements. Of equal importance is establishing educational initiatives for preventing DE.

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