

WithAll 

WHAT TO SAY COACH'S GUIDE

**Tips to Prevent Eating Disorders &
What to Say When Concerned**



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Hey, Coach!

Most eating disorders start with body dissatisfaction and build over time — but you can help set young people on a different path. As a coach, you're often the first line of defense. You set the tone for how athletes think about their bodies, food, and performance.

The good news? A few simple actions and a bit of awareness can make a huge difference. This guide will help you recognize the signs, know what to say, and create a team environment that supports both mental and physical health.

Let's get started.





Tips for Eating Disorder Prevention in Athletes

- **Focus on performance, not weight.** De-emphasize weight and appearance. Instead, talk about skill, strength, and endurance.
- **Avoid suggesting weight loss or food restriction.** In many cases, weight loss is unnecessary, risky and outside the athlete's control. Restricting food can quickly lead to harmful behaviors that put both performance and well-being at risk.
- **Promote realistic, individualized goals.** Help athletes measure progress based on effort and ability, not body size.
- **Avoid singling out athletes based on size or weight.** Calling attention to body size can create shame and comparison, even when that's not the intent.
- **Keep body comments off the table.** Avoid commenting on athletes' bodies — even compliments can reinforce harmful focus.

Go Deeper: [What to Say to Young Athletes About Body Image, Food & Exercise](#)



Eating Disorder Warning Signs

- Preoccupation with weight, calories, or food.
- Cutting out entire food groups (e.g., carbs, fats).
- Dieting. Period.
- Skipping meals or eating extremely small meals or meals that do not provide much energy.
- Avoiding team meals or food-related situations.
- Compulsive or excessive exercise beyond normal training and being very rigid in their exercise schedule.
- Sudden weight loss or gain.
- Overuse injuries, especially stress fractures.
- A strong need for control or perfectionism.



If you notice several of these signs, trust your instincts — early intervention can make a difference.

Go Deeper: [Additional Warning Signs & Misconceptions](#)



If You're Concerned About an Athlete

- 1 Lead with compassion. Listen first.
- 2 Don't comment on weight changes. Keep the focus on overall well-being.
- 3 Share what you've noticed with care.
 - "I've noticed you seem tired and are skipping meals, and I'm worried about your health."
 - "You seem more fatigued at practice lately, and this concerns me."
- 4 Acknowledge your role. Acknowledge you don't have all the answers or the expertise, but others do. Share that you will help connect them to that additional support.
- 5 Involve parents and professionals early. The sooner support begins, the better the outcomes.
- 6 Follow up. Checking back with the athlete and their parents shows care and reinforces that their health matters most.

Go Deeper: A Resource to Share: What Parents Can Do If They're Worried About Their Athlete



Additional Resources

- **WithAll: What to Say Coaches Certification & Challenge**

Tools and training to help you talk confidently about food, body image, and health.

- **National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA): Coaches & Trainers Toolkit**

- **Association of Applied Sport Psychology: Eating Disorder Resources**

- **Books**

- **Sick Enough** by Dr. Jennifer Gaudiani

- **Finding Your Sweet Spot** by Rebecca McConville

Go Deeper:

Access links to all of these resources



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