

How to Identify an Athlete with Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia

Being "skinny" does not necessarily mean one has anorexia nervosa, just as being ideal weight does not necessarily mean one is healthy. An athlete with anorexia nervosa or bulimia may continue to perform well for a longer-than-expected period of time due to sheer determination combined with the body's remarkable ability to adapt to adverse circumstances. Dieting, weight loss, and pre-event diet rituals do not mean an athlete has anorexia nervosa or bulimia. However, if the following signs or behaviors appear, there is need to pay attention.

- Repeated comments about being or feeling fat and questions such as "Do you think I'm fat?" when weight is below average.
- Weight loss below ideal competitive weight set for that athlete and which continues even during off-season.
- Secretive eating, perhaps noted by food wrappers in room or locker, or sneaking food from training table.
- Repeated disappearing immediately after eating, especially if a substantial amount of food was eaten.
- Apparent nervousness or agitation if something prevents ability to be alone shortly after eating.
- Bloodshot eyes, especially after being in the bathroom or any other place where vomiting could have occurred.
- Vomitous odor or vomit in toilet, sink, shower, or wastebasket.
- Extreme weight fluctuations.
- Complaints or evidence of bloating or water retention not explained by premenstrual edema (in females) or other known medical conditions.
- Frequent complaints of constipation.
- Lightheadedness, disequilibrium (loss of balance), mood swing not accounted for by other known medical causes.
- Avoiding situations where the athlete would be observed eating. For example, scheduling other activities at mealtimes, refusing to eat at training table or with teammates on road trips. This may be disguised by an extreme interest in the eating habits of others.