

National Collegiate Athletic Association Eating Disorders in Female Athletes



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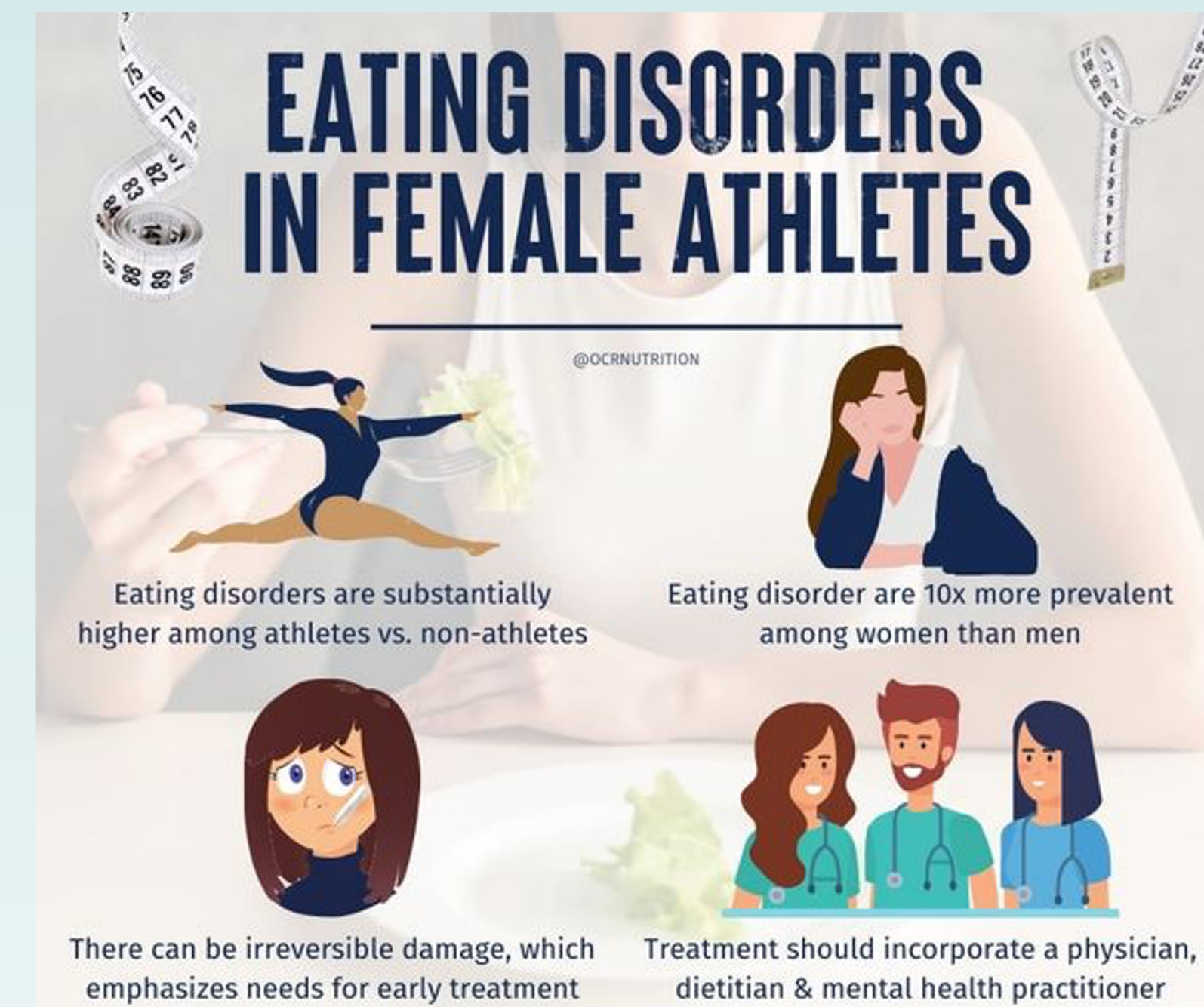


Introduction

- The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the organization overseeing collegiate sports in the United States. There is a community of approximately 500,000 student-athletes that compete in college athletics (1).
- The development of an eating disorder has negative effects on an athlete's physical and mental wellbeing. Currently, there is no NCAA mandated program for eating disorder education and prevention leaving female student-athletes at risk.

Community Assessment and Analysis

- In 2018-2019 there were 498,691 student-athletes from 1,098 colleges. 56% are male and 44% are female (1).
- From 1982 to 2016 there was a 13% increase in female participation in the NCAA (2).
- Many student-athletes rely on an athletic scholarship to pay for college tuition, which adds pressure to perform well athletically (2).
- Money allocated towards athletic scholarships and resources—such as having a sports psychologist, a certified nutritionist, or informational programs regarding mental health— vary by school and sport as each school spends their budget differently.
- The most common physical issue among NCAA athletes are orthopedic injuries. Many athletes who experience long term injuries begin to display signs of depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation and changes in eating behaviors(3).
- One notable reaction to injury by student-athletes is restricting caloric intake because of the belief that because they are not participating in sports they do not deserve to eat. This behavior can increase risk for disordered eating in a population that is already susceptible to eating disorders (3).
- Inequality in educational resources regarding eating disorders puts athletes without these resources at a higher risk for the development of eating disorder.



Problem in the Community

- Athletes are 2-3 times more likely to develop eating disorders than non-athletes (4).
- The American College of Sports Medicine defined disordered eating as a “wide spectrum of harmful and often ineffective eating behaviors used in attempts to lose weight or achieve a lean appearance” (5).
- Some ways of achieving this lean appearance could fall under the category of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating, avoidant/restrictive food intake and even pica (5).
- Athletes hold themselves to such high standards that increase the risk of negative self and body assessments (5).
- Different sports have different “sport stereotypes” that lead the athlete to think that is the ideal shape they should look like (5).
- Whether it is male or female, athletes are more perfectionists than non-athletes (6).
- Eating disorders can easily sabotage an athletes performance by feeling fatigue, light headed and mentally/physically drained (7).
- By having the proper coaches, trainers, and tools, eating disorders can decrease and bring awareness for the future athletes.

Proposed Solution

Nutritional Counseling Assisting Athlete (NCAA)

Nutritional Counseling Assisting Athletes is the new innovative solution to decreasing the probability of eating disorders.

The Nutritional Counseling Assisting Athletes would mandate that all NCAA schools that participate in athletic programs have a sports psychologist and nutritionist as part of their individual athletic departments. Prior to each semester, athletes will have to participate in interactive modules and screenings in order to prevent eating disorders and screen for those at risk.

In this program athletes will:

- Identify the physical and mental consequences of eating disorders
- Discuss the resources for support if having thoughts or difficulty with their nutrition or their mental health
- Initiate preventative actions to take in order to decrease the risk of an eating disorder
- Identify proper nutritional intake
- Participate in mental health screenings

The goal of the Nutritional Counseling Assisting Athletes program is that an athlete’s mental health will be taken as seriously as their physical well being by NCAA athletic departments. Athletes will learn to have a positive relationship with their mind and body (8). They will do this using the beneficial resources of a nutritionist and psychologist to help maintain this relationship (9).

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