Athletes and Eating Disorders
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Sports associated with eating disorders

- Eating disorders and disordered eating are significant problems for many athletes.
- Female athletes are especially at risk in sports which emphasize a thin body or appearance, such as gymnastics, ballet, figure skating, swimming, and distance running.
- Male athletes are especially at risk in body building and wrestling.
- A greater risk is associated with sports in which anaerobic activities predominate over aerobic activities.

Gender and eating disorders among athletes

- 90% of eating disorders occur among women.
- There is some evidence, however, that male athletes are at least equally at risk as female athletes for certain types of eating pathology.
- A study of NCAA athletes found that:
  -- Binge eating occurred more often in male athletes than in female athletes.
  -- More than three times as many male athletes as female athletes used saunas or steam baths to lose weight.
  -- The same percentage of males and females used steroids to improve athletic performance.
  -- Female athletes were four times more likely than males to use vomiting to lose weight.
  -- White female athletes have significantly lower self esteem than Black male or female athletes or White male athletes.
- Female athletes who abuse anabolic-androgenic steroids may develop significant psychiatric symptoms including hypomania or depression.

Causes of eating disorders among athletes

1. The idealization of thinness in our society
   - Judges in gymnastics and figure skating have progressively rewarded thinner athletes.
2. The unsubstantiated belief that lower body fat enhances performance
3. Pre-selection
   - Individuals who are preoccupied with weight and appearance may be more likely to participate in athletics.
4. Exercise
   - Animal studies have shown that a dramatic increase in activity can precipitate a decrease in appetite and severe weight loss.
5. Body dissatisfaction
   - Athletes at risk for eating disorders are often those who are particularly anxious and critical of their own athletic performance and who express these concerns by dissatisfaction with their bodies.
6. Perfectionism
   - Among female athletes, a history of perfectionism confers additional risk for an eating disorder.
7. Mood
   - Depressed mood in both male and female athletes may mask disordered eating attitudes.