**Reflection: Eating Disorders in Sports**

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This workshop’s key objectives were to recognize the complexities of identifying eating disorders and leveraging an individual’s sport and identity as an athlete during treatment. Dr. Nikols does a fantastic job of highlighting the unique risk factors of athletes.1

He starts off by discussing the difference between disordered eating and eating disorders in athletes. Disordered eating is an unhealthy obsession with eating, with a fixation on food quality and purity. Any deviation from that diet results in self-loathing, guilt or punishment. It doesn’t meet the frequency, intensity or psychological criteria to be diagnosed as an eating disorder. Whereas, an eating disorder is defined as a mental illness that's characterized by persistent eating disturbances and psychological impairments.2 It’s important to understand the difference between the two, so we are aware what type and level of intervention is required to treat the problem.

I really enjoyed the section where he talks about the importance of expressing concern in athletes with this disorder. Knowing what to say, how to say it, and what to avoid, is certainly tricky. As someone who wants to go into this field after getting my license, these tips are very helpful. I sometimes have this issue where I end up saying something that can sometimes be misinterpreted wrongly because I end up phrasing things weirdly. Being careful and mindful of how I communicate with these patients is extremely necessary, and Dr. Nikols explains that very well.

Quite a few misconceptions were also addressed in this workshop. One was that a leaner athlete performs better, when in reality, research in the area is equivocal. Another was that “a low heart-rate is normal because I’m an athlete”. Dr. Nikols mentions that research has shown that it’s rare for an athlete’s resting heart rate to fall below 50. It was interesting seeing him tackle all these misconceptions and giving examples from his own experiences of helping athletes.

Dr. Nikols also addressed the problem of experiencing weight pressures from teammates and coaches. These kinds of pressures are the reasons behind restrictive dieting and negative body image issues, which can manifest into eating disorders. Coaches, in particular, have significant influence over their athlete’s, which can heighten the pressure they’re feeling and increase their risk for eating disorders. He mentions that there are at least 40 other factors responsible for athletic performance. Why then, is one factor (mainly weight) being specifically focused on, that could increase the risk of developing or worsening an eating disorder? It’s a good question to think about.

Overall, this workshop was very enlightening and I enjoyed it. It was interesting to learn more about eating disorders, with a focus on athletes. Sports nutrition isn’t really my area of interest, but eating disorders is, so I’m glad this workshop gave me more of an interested in this field.

**References**

1. Eating Disorders in Sports. www.youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmIo3OekhWU>

2. Baker Dennis A. Disordered Eating vs. Eating Disorders - National Eating Disorders Association. National Eating Disorders Association. Published March 8, 2024. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/what-is-the-difference-between-disordered-eating-and-eating-disorders/>