



Guidance for Sport and Fitness Professionals

Fitness professionals have a potentially very important role in helping to prevent the serious consequences of an eating disorder. While exercise is important for healthy living, it can become obsessive for those with eating disorders, and can be a form of perfectionism. The risk to heart, bones, fertility and of suicide are great. Club staff members should ensure that clients feel supported and encouraged with their exercise programmes, while also monitoring changes in their clients' health. With this in mind, ABC has produced these guidelines and is developing a more comprehensive course which will be available in the New Year.

ABC provides training and resources to equip parents, families, friends and professionals. These guidelines have been produced in association with ABC's Registered sports nutritionist and Dietitian, updating an earlier guidance note written for Cimsa, UK Active and REPS.

Signs to look out for:

Anorexia: Signs to notice (N.B. Affecting men and women of all ages)

- Continuing weight loss
- Visible bones, ribcage (perhaps concealed under loose fitting clothes)
- Growth of downy hair on face, legs and arms
- Complaints about feeling cold
- Distorted perception of body image and weight
- Obsessive use of weighing scales
- Changes in mood and emotions
- Compulsive excessive exercise
- Continuing with high intensity/endurance training despite a physical injury or complaint
- Willingly supplying food to others
- Possible purging methods – laxatives, SIV, slimming pills.

Bulimia: Additional Signs to notice (N.B. those with BN will be at near or normal weight, those with purging forms of AN will often experience the below effects in addition)

- Dental erosion and mouth sores
- Bad breath
- Grazed knuckles
- Throat infections
- Swollen salivary glands
- Frequent dehydration
- Frequent complaints of muscle cramps and weakness

Binge Eating Disorder

- Overweight or obese
- Joint and mobility issues
- Shortness of breath
- Risk of Type 2 Diabetes

How to offer support to staff members:

- Many pre-activity health screening systems, e.g. a PARQ/HCS, include an undertaking by the new club member that he/she will notify club staff if there is a change in state of health. This enables the club to review or suspend any exercise programme.
- Staff should look out for any changes in a member's health which may not be reported but become apparent to club staff, or to other members e.g. incidents of fainting, weight loss.
- ABC advises that whether reported or observed, the change in their state of health should be the subject of a prompt, tactful conversation with the member (and a subsequent file note) undertaken by the Club Manager.
- The Club Manager should advise the member concerned to visit his/her GP to take advice on the desirability and/or safety of continuing an exercise programme in the light of their change in health, and some medical monitoring.
- A subsequent letter from the member, addressed to the Club Manager and confirming the outcome of having taken GP advice, will also be necessary.
- ABC would advise The Club Manager to act appropriately to continue, to modify or to cease the member's exercise programme and note this action on file with the letter received from the member.

How appropriate is it to encourage sport for those with eating disorders?

The Standard PARQ does not currently include the relevant questions to assess any potential eating disorders. It is highly recommended that each new client has a personal one-on-one induction with a trainer. The answers to the questions below will help you to identify those who may potentially have an eating disorder:

- Weight history
- BMI - if there is an immediate concern over a person's physical health due to obvious low weight, finding out their BMI is vital. This can be worked out online using weight and height:
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm
- A BMI of 15 is severe anorexia and no physical activity should be undertaken without regular medical monitoring and a doctor's written consent
- As BMI is only a guide, consider intervening at higher BMIs if symptoms are apparent
- Physical activity history – is exercise something new or previously regularly engaged in?
- Sleeping pattern
- Temperature control
- Menstrual regularity for female clients
- In male clients, if you need clarification and feel able to ask, consider asking 'have you noticed a decline in libido recently?' This would suggest lower testosterone due to weight loss and low body fat levels, restricted eating etc.

How to support those taking part in sports with weight restrictions e.g. rowing and boxing:

When it comes to making weight in sport the most important thing is ensuring that the athlete is supported, primarily through contact with a sports Dietitian and psychologist. If this is not possible, work with the athlete to ensure they have plenty of time to achieve their goal weight. A slow and steady weight loss through a small deficit in energy and a small increase in physical activity is the best and most sustainable method of weight loss.