

SCOTTISH RITE



NUTRITION GUIDANCE FOR THE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE ATHLETE

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This material was presented by Taylor Morrison, M.S., R.D., CSSD, L.D., in the lecture series Coffee, Kids and Sports Medicine. Together with Corey S. Gill, M.D., M.A., Morrison addressed weight management strategies that can be used by athletes who are overweight or obese. Once the athlete is ready, these strategies can be used to reduce the musculoskeletal and surgical risks associated with obesity.

DISCUSSING WEIGHT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Some young athletes may struggle with being overweight or obese. Those who face health or surgical risks due to their weight or who have recently experienced unhealthy unintentional weight gain may benefit from weight management efforts. While weight management may be beneficial for some, practitioners, family, coaches and friends must appreciate that this is a sensitive topic.

Well-intentioned practitioners often counsel overweight youth to adopt better habits in an effort to reduce their weight. Unfortunately, this can have unintended consequences if not handled appropriately. Before initiating any conversation about weight management, one should assess signs of readiness. In doing this, we must understand that children and teens are in a vulnerable state of growth and development. This makes them more aware of their bodies, increases their risk of low self-esteem and makes them more susceptible to disordered eating and eating disorders. Everyone must also remember that weight management may take time, require proper monitoring and be very difficult.

If the young athlete is ready to start weight management efforts, the following approaches have been shown to contribute to long-term weight loss and maintenance:

Focus on the Long Game

For children and growing teens, the goal is weight maintenance as they grow, which allows their body mass index (BMI) to fall into a healthy percentile range as they get older.

Influence Matters

Parental involvement and modeling of healthy eating behaviors are crucial. However, parental restriction over the child's eating patterns and vocal concern about the child's weight is discouraged.

Resist the Urge to Restrict

Restrictive diets have been found to be unsuccessful because they may have growth and development or mental health risks associated with them, and they may not be sustainable. Encourage consistent meals and snacks each day, using non-diet, stop light or intuitive eating approaches. These strategies put health at the center of the conversation instead of weight.

The musculoskeletal and surgical risks associated with obesity are well known, and therefore, the potential improvements associated with implementing health-centered eating habits are important. These strategies will not be successful for all. Consulting a dietitian or provider focused on the care and management of overweight and obese children and adolescents may improve their chances of success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

TAYLOR MORRISON, M.S., R.D., CSSD, L.D., is a registered and certified sports dietitian, specializing in wellness, sports and exercise nutrition. Morrison's experience as a young competitive figure skater and cross country runner strongly influenced her interest in working with active children and adolescents. She consults with young athletes in the Sports Medicine clinic as well as directly in schools and on sports teams. Morrison also serves as the director of the Wellness department at Scottish Rite.

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