

Eating Disorder Recovery & Running

Support for athletes and families navigating recovery from an eating disorder — a health-and-treatment-team-first guide, where running follows the care team's lead.

ACCESS

Free resource

AUDIENCE

athlete / coach / parent

READ TIME

3 min

AUDIENCE

Athlete + Coach + Parent

WHY THIS MATTERS

Recovery is led by an athlete's treatment team, not by a training plan.



Eating Disorder Recovery & Running

QUICK START

Start here

Support for athletes and families navigating recovery from an eating disorder — a health-and-treatment-team-first guide, where running follows the care team's...



START HERE

Running cannot outrun a body that is still medically or nutritionally unstable

- Food restoration, symptom stabilization, and clinical support come before aggressive training goals.
- A motivated athlete can still be unsafe to progress.



COACH ROLE

Coaches support safety, structure, and language, not food policing

- Avoid body comments, public weigh-ins, and praise for visible control or restraint.
- Use simple check-ins around energy, soreness, mood, and consistency instead of diet interrogation.



RETURN TO RUNNING

Progression needs medical clearance plus enough intake to support the load

- Short easy sessions may restart before speed, intensity, or volume return.
- The food plan has to rise with the training plan instead of lagging behind it.

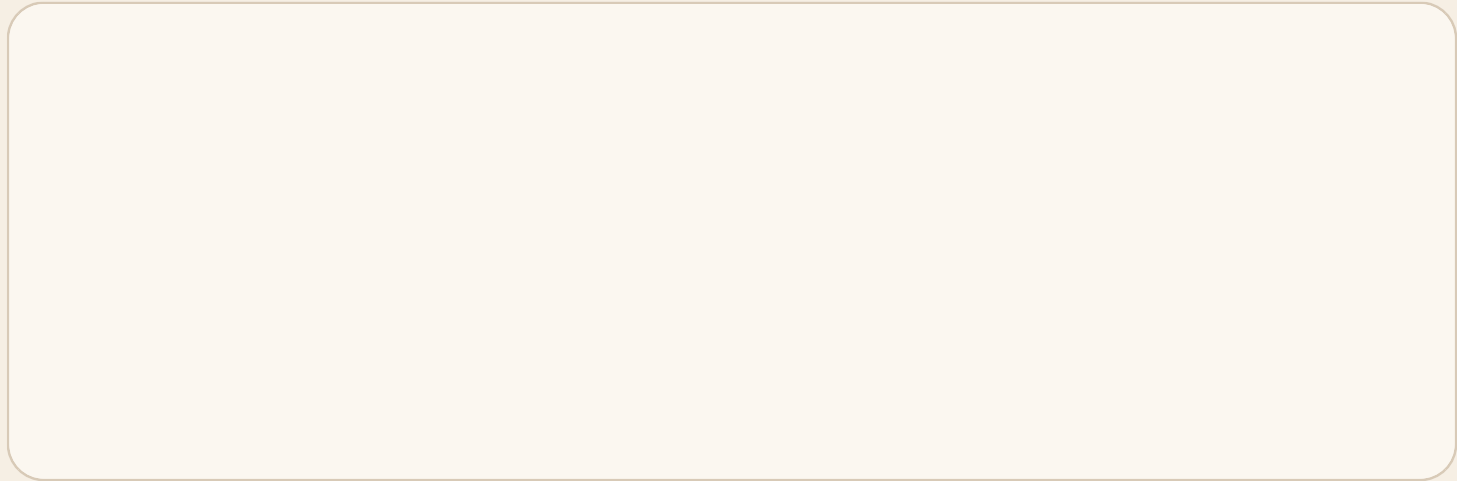
CONTEXT

Why running can complicate recovery

Because of this, decisions about whether and how much an athlete runs during recovery belong with the treatment team, based on the athlete's health — not on the season schedule.

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- Structure and routine can quietly turn into compulsion.
- Performance talk can drown out health talk.
- More running can look like "discipline" when it is really avoidance, or a way to compensate for eating.

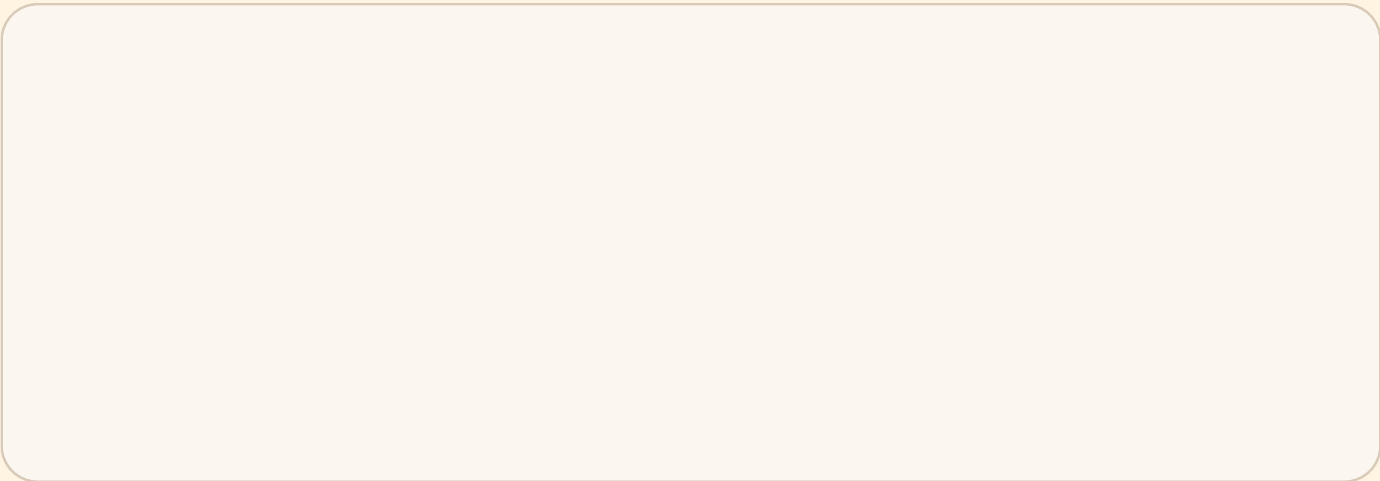


WATCH FOR

What to watch before it becomes a crisis

Performance drop-offs, stress injuries, menstrual disruption, and persistent fatigue rarely show up as isolated issues.

- Under-fueling is often quieter than coaches expect.
- The best first move is usually a food-plus-screening conversation, not a supplement guess.
- Parents and coaches should hear the same short message.



Signs it is time to step back from training

Loop in the treatment team, and consider pausing running, if you notice:

Loop in the treatment team, and consider pausing running, if you notice:

- Running to "make up for" eating.
- Secret or extra mileage.
- Panic or distress when a run is missed.

What coaches and parents can say

Keep it about health and support, and keep your own comments off the athlete's body, weight, and food:

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- Your health comes first — always.
- We will follow what your care team says about running.
- We are not going to use exercise to deal with food or guilt.

The bottom line

Running is not required for recovery, and it is never a reward for it.

Running is not required for recovery, and it is never a reward for it. If and when it returns, it returns slowly, on the treatment team's timeline, with support and clear boundaries — and with the people around the athlete focused on the person, not the performance.

Recovery is guided by an athlete's care team; a registered dietitian who specializes in this can be part of that team — reach out through aspireperformancerd.com.

QUICK REFERENCE

Key targets to keep in view

Use these as planning anchors when you turn the manual into weekly actions.

PRIORITY

Stability before training progression

Treat this as a decision anchor, not a trivia stat.

TEAM NEEDED

Medical + nutrition + mental health

Treat this as a decision anchor, not a trivia stat.

COACH JOB

Support without monitoring food

Treat this as a decision anchor, not a trivia stat.

COACH TAKEAWAYS

Use this with athletes

These are the cues worth repeating before the week gets busy.

- ☐ Protect the athlete: Health markers lead the timeline, not race goals.
- ☐ Use the team: Medical, nutrition, and mental health support all matter here.
- ☐ Coach language: Be calm, specific, and referral-ready.

COACH CUES

Field reference

Use these short cues when you need to turn the manual into a quick conversation or decision.

PRIMARY FOCUS

Female Athletes

Support for athletes and families navigating recovery from an eating disorder — a...

THIS WEEK'S CUE

Keep the language centered on safety and support, then hand the treatment decisions to the care...

Use this sentence in the next team conversation.

KEY THEMES

eating disorder • recovery • disordered eating • support

These are the anchors to reinforce, not the entire lecture.

BEST FOLLOW-UP

Iron protocol

Turn warning signs into action.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Use it this week

Keep the language centered on safety and support, then hand the treatment decisions to the care team.

BOTTOM LINE

Recovery support has to come before performance urgency.

RELATED TOOL

Iron protocol

Turn warning signs into action.

Source topics: Mountjoy M, Sundgot-Borgen JK, Burke LM, et al. (2023) IOC 2023 consensus statement on REDs. British Journal of Sports Medicine, 57:1073-1098. • De Souza MJ, Nattiv A, Joy E, et al. (2014) 2014 Female Athlete Triad Coalition consensus statement. British Journal of Sports Medicine, 48(4):289.