

When to Get Help

Red flags that indicate your athlete needs a dietitian or medical provider.

ACCESS
Free resource

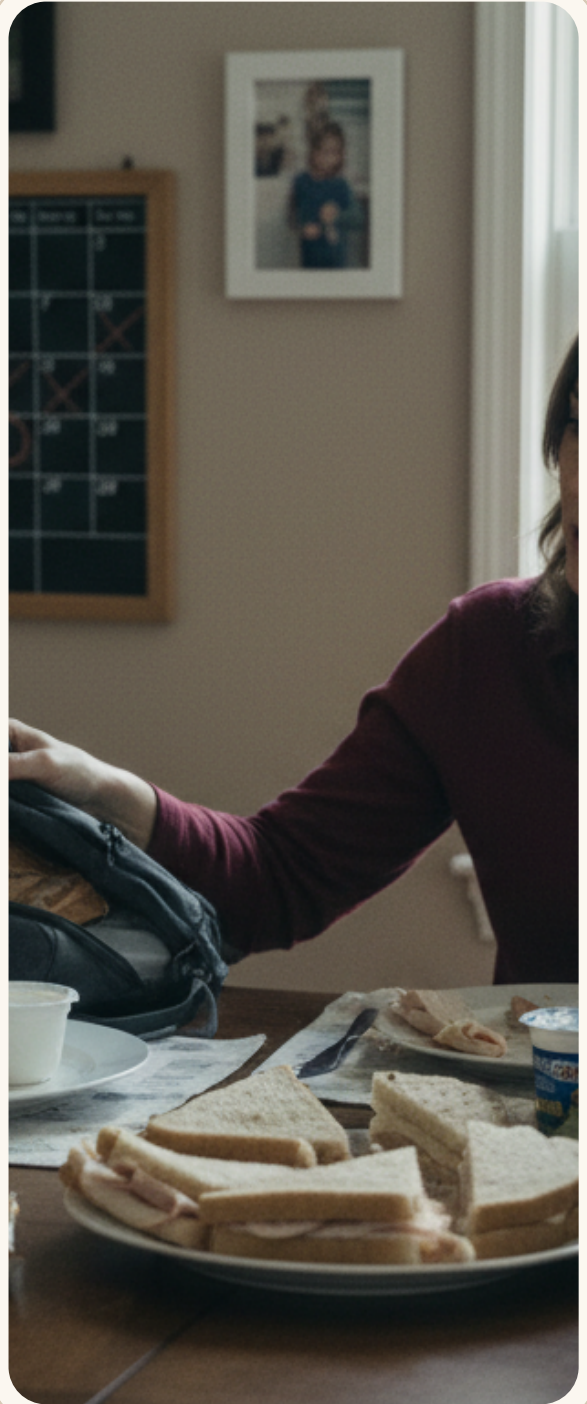
AUDIENCE
parent / coach

READ TIME
4 min

AUDIENCE
Parent + Coach

WHY THIS MATTERS

Red flags that indicate your athlete needs a dietitian or medical provider.



When to Get Help

QUICK START

Start here

Red flags that indicate your athlete needs a dietitian or medical provider.



PERFORMANCE CLUES

The early signs often look like normal athlete struggles

- Fatigue, repeated flat sessions, slow recovery, and frequent illness matter.
- Stress injuries or sudden performance drop matter even more.



FOOD BEHAVIOR

Escalate when food fear or rigid control shows up

- Skipping meals, restricting whole food groups, or panic around eating is enough to act.
- Obsessive weighing or body checking raises concern quickly.



CONVERSATION MOVE

Use concern language, not accusation language

- Lead with what you are seeing in energy, mood, injuries, and eating.
- Offer help early instead of demanding a confession.

Call sooner when patterns start clustering

One rough workout does not mean much.

One rough workout does not mean much. A cluster does.

Take it seriously when you are seeing more than one of these at the same time:

- unusual fatigue that is not improving
- repeated injuries or bone-stress issues
- missed periods or major cycle changes

IMPLEMENTATION

What helps home feel easier

Parents need repeatable defaults more than a perfect plan.

What makes home harder

- Long nutrition lectures with too many rules
- No visible defaults for breakfast, snacks, or bottles
- Reacting after the athlete is already hungry or frustrated

What helps

- One short family script
- One repeatable breakfast, snack, and bottle routine
- Preparation the night before practice or school

FAMILY SETUP

What to set up at home this week

Parents do not need a perfect kitchen; they need repeatable defaults.

- ☐ Stock one breakfast the athlete will actually eat on school mornings.
- ☐ Choose one lunch add-on and one after-school snack that can be packed fast.
- ☐ Make the bottle, snack, and recovery food visible the night before.
- ☐ Use one short family script instead of a long nutrition lecture.

Same week appointment

missed periods or cycle disruption

clear under-fueling pattern

recurrent injury

rapid performance decline plus fatigue

growing food fear, secrecy, or rigid rules

Go deeper next

Understand the broader under-fueling picture: RED-S Warning Signs and Prevention

If the athlete is in middle school or high school, fix the base first: Adolescent Runner Nutrition

If fatigue and heavy legs are showing up, screen iron early: Iron Questions: A Food-First,...

When a sports dietitian makes sense

Start here when the issue looks like under-fueling, poor recovery, confusion around eating, or a pattern the family cannot organize on its own.

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Common reasons:

- athlete skips breakfast or lunch regularly
- athlete is always tired or hungry but still not recovering well
- performance is sliding without a clear training explanation

QUICK REFERENCE

Key targets to keep in view

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

RED FLAGS

Performance + health

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

DO NOT WAIT FOR

Rock bottom

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

WHO TO CALL

MD + RD + AT

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

COACH TAKEAWAYS

Coach reminder

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

- ☐ Notice the pattern: Health, eating, and performance all count.
- ☐ Speak calmly: Concern opens doors better than control.
- ☐ Refer early: You do not need certainty to ask for support.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Use it this week

Which current sign would be enough for you to stop guessing and start referring?

BOTTOM LINE

Early referral protects the athlete faster than waiting for obvious collapse.

RELATED TOOL

Parent email generator

Turn the manual into a family message.

Source topics: Mountjoy M, Ackerman KE, Bailey DM, et al. IOC consensus statement on Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (REDs): 2023 update. Br J Sports Med. 2023;57(17):1073-1097. • Williams NI, De Souza MJ, Misra M, et al. 2025 Update to the Female Athlete Triad Coalition Consensus Statement Part 2: Clinical Guidelines for Screening, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Return to Play for Adolescents and Adults. Sports Med. 2026;56(2):375-427. • Desbrow B. Youth Athlete Development and Nutrition. Sports Med. 2021;51(Suppl 1):3-12.