Missouri Valley College Athletic Department

Policy for Eating Disorders in Student-Athletes

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I. Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention

Keys Factors of Eating:

- The **first** key to listening to your body is being able to **detect when you are getting hungry**. If you are indeed truly hungry, and not just looking for food to cure your boredom, stress, or loneliness, then it is time to refuel.

- The **second** key is being able to **know when you have had enough. Listen to your body**. When you begin to feel full, you will know that you have had enough to eat. The goal is to feel content--not uncomfortably stuffed but not starving either. Sometimes this means eating 5 or 6 smaller meals a day instead of 3 large meals. And, remember it takes about 20 minutes for your body to realize it's full. Also, **be aware of what you are eating**--sit, chew slowly, enjoy the tastes, smells, and textures of your food.

- The **third** key is moderation, nothing to extremes. Often people hear this advice and think it means they can eat whatever they crave, all the time. Obviously we cannot survive on potato chips or peanut butter cookies alone. And if you tried, chances are you'd probably start to crave some pasta or fresh fruit after awhile. These cravings are your body's way of helping you get the nutrients it knows you need.

II. Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.

Primary Symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa:

- Resistance to maintaining body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height
- Intense fear of weight gain or being "fat" even though underweight.
- Disturbance in the experience of body weight or shape, undue influence of weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight.
- Loss of menstrual periods in girls and women post-puberty.

Warning Signs of Anorexia Nervosa:

- Dramatic weight loss.
- Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, fat grams, and dieting.
- Refusal to eat certain foods, progressing to restrictions against whole categories of food (e.g. no carbohydrates, etc.).
- Frequent comments about feeling "fat" or overweight despite weight loss.
- Anxiety about gaining weight or being "fat."
- Denial of hunger.
- Development of food rituals (e.g. eating foods in certain orders, excessive chewing, rearranging food on a plate).
- Consistent excuses to avoid mealtimes or situations involving food.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen--despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury--the need to "burn off" calories taken in.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.
- In general, behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting, and control of food are becoming primary concerns.

Health Consequences of Anorexia Nervosa:

Anorexia nervosa involves self-starvation. The body is denied the essential nutrients it needs to function normally, so it is forced to slow down all of its processes to conserve energy. This "slowing down" can have serious medical consequences.

- Abnormally slow heart rate and low blood pressure, which mean that the heart muscle is changing. The risk for heart failure rises as heart rate and blood pressure levels sink lower and lower.
- Reduction of bone density (osteoporosis), which results in dry, brittle bones.
- Muscle loss and weakness.
- Severe dehydration, which can result in kidney failure.
- Fainting, fatigue, and overall weakness.
- Dry hair and skin, hair loss is common.
- Growth of a downy layer of hair called lanugo all over the body, including the face, in an effort to keep the body warm.

III. Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by a cycle of binging and compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating.

Primary Symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa:

- Regular intake of large amounts of food accompanied by a sense of loss of control over eating behavior.
- Regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, laxative or diuretic abuse, fasting, and/or obsessive or compulsive exercise.
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape.

Warning Signs of Bulimia Nervosa:

- Evidence of binge-eating, including disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time or the existence of wrappers and containers indicating the consumption of large amounts of food.
- Evidence of purging behaviors, including frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting, presence of wrappers or packages of laxatives or diuretics.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen--despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury--the need to "burn off" calories taken in.
- Unusual swelling of the cheeks or jaw area.
- Calluses on the back of the hands and knuckles from self-induced vomiting.
- Discoloration or staining of the teeth.
- Creation of complex lifestyle schedules or rituals to make time for binge-and-purge sessions.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.
- In general, behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting, and control of food are becoming primary concerns.

Health Consequences of Bulimia Nervosa:

Bulimia nervosa can be extremely harmful to the body. The recurrent binge-and-purge cycles can impact the entire digestive system and purge behaviors can lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body that affect the heart and other major organ functions.

- Electrolyte imbalances that can lead to irregular heartbeats and possibly heart failure and death. Electrolyte imbalance is caused by dehydration and loss of potassium and sodium from the body as a result of purging behaviors.
- Inflammation and possible rupture of the esophagus from frequent vomiting.
- Tooth decay and staining from stomach acids released during frequent vomiting.
- Chronic irregular bowel movements and constipation as a result of laxative abuse.
- Gastric rupture is an uncommon but possible side effect of binge eating.

IV. Binge Eating Disorder

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is a type of eating disorder not otherwise specified and is characterized by recurrent binge eating without the regular compensatory behaviors seen in bulimia nervosa.

Primary Symptoms of Binge Eating:

- Frequent episodes of eating large quantities of food in short periods of time.
- Feeling out of control over eating behavior.
- Feeling ashamed or disgusted by the behavior.
- There are also several behavioral indicators of BED including eating when not hungry and eating in secret.

Health Consequences of Binge Eating:

The health risks of BED are most commonly those associated with clinical obesity.

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels
- Heart disease
- Diabetes mellitus
- Gallbladder disease

V. How to Help Someone with an Eating Disorder

- Let the person know you care and you are there to give support. Reach out to the person, instead of focusing on the eating behavior.
- Don't nag about eating or not eating, or spend your time talking about food or weight-related issues.
- Encourage the person to seek professional help. Be prepared that your suggestion may be initially met with denial and hostility.
- Find outside support for yourself. You can talk to a counselor, doctor, or other professional, or attend a support group for family and friends of someone with an eating disorder.
- Avoid comments on weight or appearance. Even if you "compliment" someone on losing weight, you may be giving the message that you only like the person because of the weight loss.
- Read and learn as much as you can about eating disorders. It will help you to understand more about what the person is going through.
- Be patient; overcoming an eating problem takes time and help. It is not just a matter of willpower.

V. Eating Disorder Policy for Missouri Valley College

The purpose of this policy is to: identify, evaluate, treat, educate, refer, and provide support of affected student-athletes with any eating disorder to ensure a healthy dietary lifestyle. If any student-athlete at Missouri Valley College seeks help with an eating disorder, or if any student-athlete looks/appears or is said to have an eating disorder; the head or assistant athletic trainer must be immediately informed of the student-athletes condition. At any time the athletic training staff, team physician, or the athlete's family physician can remove a student-athlete from participation within athletics from Missouri Valley College due to any eating disorder when health is in jeopardy.

- If the student-athlete is willing to receive the athletic departments assistance, the athletic training staff, head coach, team physician, administrators, counseling staff, and additional outside professionals will assist the student-athlete in all factors to achieving a healthy recovery.

All information about a perceived or affected student-athlete will be held in the strictest confidentiality.