Healthy Ways to MANAGE WEIGHT

Athletes often connect appearance and weight with performance. Wrestling, youth football, rowing and boxing use weight categories to support healthy, safe and fair competition. In dance, distance running, gymnastics and cycling, body composition is thought to affect both the physical and aesthetic aspects of performance. Lean body mass and lower body-fat levels can offer health and performance benefits, but losing too much weight can have harmful consequences.

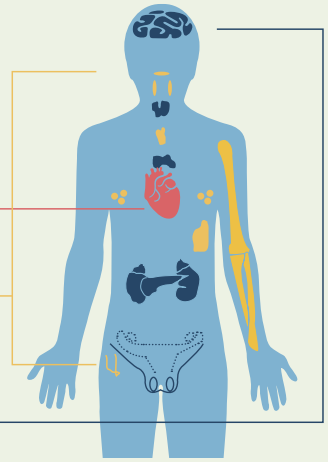
Unsafe weight-control practices can impair athletic performance and harm overall health.

What is unsafe? Problematic weight-control behaviors include skipping food, binge eating, purging, restricting calories and limiting fluid intake.

Athletes may face pressure to manage their weight from parents, coaches, society and judging standards. These influences can encourage unrealistic weight targets and harmful weight-control behaviors.

Unhealthy weight-management methods can reduce energy, aerobic performance, memory, visual understanding, reaction speed and the ability to plan efficiently.

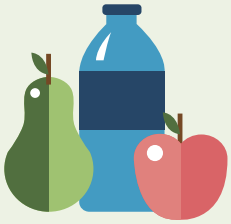
Very low-calorie diets can harm these systems:



Athletes can use healthy methods to reach appropriate weight and body-composition goals.

Discuss practical, personalized weight and body-composition goals with an athletic trainer, family physician or registered dietitian.

An effective weight-management plan combines diet and exercise and is tailored to the athlete's individual needs.





Diet:

Base calorie intake on lean body mass, desired body composition, target weight, and sport or activity needs.

- A balanced eating plan includes nutrients that supply energy - protein, carbohydrates and fats - plus nutrients that do not provide energy: vitamins, minerals and water.
- Keep a healthy eating pattern throughout the year.

Exercise:

Aim to make weight and body-composition changes before the competitive season.

- In the competitive season, emphasize performance, strength, power and training intensity.
- During off-season preparation, emphasize physical conditioning, building lean body mass, aerobic fitness and muscular endurance.

Make body-composition changes gradually. Avoid severe restrictions and the use of unsafe practices or products.

Aim to lose one to two pounds per week, without exceeding 1.5 percent of body weight. Faster losses may signal unsafe practices that harm performance and health.



Source: NATA | Infographic supplied by the National Athletic Trainers' Association