

# In the Nutrition Lane

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## Disordered Eating: Concern among Swimmers?

Although eating disorders are estimated to affect about 3-4% of athletes, the prevalence of *disordered eating* is believed to be much higher. Disordered eating involves abnormal eating behaviors and food attitudes that result in poor nutrition and sometimes develop into anorexia nervosa (severe food restriction with extreme weight loss) or bulimia nervosa (binge and purge behaviors). The distinction between disordered eating and eating disorders is important because disordered eating is often overlooked or rationalized. USA Swimming recently established a task force to develop educational materials and identify resources for swimmers, parents, and coaches. They hope to have the first of these materials available by late 2003.

Just how does one identify disordered eating? A good starting point is to answer the 10 food attitude questions below:

### What Are Your Food Attitudes?

Circle the answer that best applies.

	Rarely/ Never	Some- times	Usually/ Always
1. Is eating a pleasant experience for you?	1	2	3
2. Do you feel good or bad about yourself based on what you've eaten?	3	2	1
3. Do you find healthful foods unappealing?	3	2	1
4. Do you feel guilty after eating a lot of food or rich foods?	3	2	1
5. Do you feel <i>compelled</i> to eat at times, or a lack of control with food?	3	2	1
6. Do you skip meals?	3	2	1
7. Do you use laxatives or induce vomiting in an effort to control weight?	3	2	1
8. Do you prefer to eat in private?	3	2	1
9. Are you preoccupied with food thoughts?	3	2	1
10. Do you exercise mainly to burn off calories?	3	2	1

Score= \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_

#### Food Attitudes Score Add up the scores you circled.

**Score:**

- 26-30 Congratulations! You seem to have a healthy relationship with food.
- 22-25 Give some thought to how your attitudes get in the way of pleasure as well as nutrition.
- 18-21 Try to view food as a friend rather than as an enemy!
- ≤17 It's hard to nourish yourself well with a negative attitude about food. You'll benefit by exploring the reasons for this perspective.

If your score is far below 17, consider seeking professional help, such as your family doctor, a therapist, or nutritionist with experience in treatment of disordered eating.