

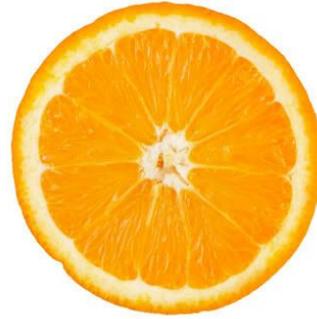
Prep School Performance Nutrition News

with

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Hello – This month, in association with National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (February 26 through March 4), Prep School Performance Nutrition News will take a look at orthorexia, a form of disordered eating characterized by excessive focus on healthy eating. Although orthorexia is not an “officially” recognized eating disorder, you are likely seeing some students who have become so involved in what they eat that other aspects of their lives are impacted. I hope that this information about orthorexia will be useful in understanding what they are experiencing.

- Kathleen Searles, MS, RDN, LDN

Orthorexia: Can Healthy Eating Go too Far?

Orthorexia is a form of disordered eating involving an obsessive interest in the quality, healthfulness and wholesomeness of food. It may start with a desire to be healthy, but evolves into a series of food rules which ultimately becomes overwhelming. Dr. Steven Bratman has proposed diagnostic criteria for orthorexia, including:

- Obsessive focus on healthy eating
- Compulsive behavior and/or preoccupation with eating only the foods perceived as healthy
- Anxiety and shame when self-imposed dietary rules are not followed
- Escalation in number and complexity of food rules over time
- Medical complications such as malnutrition or weight loss resulting from food choices
- Social or academic impairment related to beliefs about food and diet
- Sense of self and body image dependent on following food rules



The roots of orthorexia are likely genetic, as with other eating disorders, making some individuals more susceptible to over-reacting to societal emphasis on healthy eating. For example, a student may decide that she feels better with a gluten free diet. Then she may try avoiding dairy. She may decide to eat only organic, non-GMO foods. At some point she may find that she cannot enjoy family holiday celebrations because of her anxiety about whether suitable food will be available. She may feel that she can't participate in the school dining service because the food does not meet her needs. She may stop socializing with her friends because of anxiety about routine food activities such as going out for pizza.

There is not a lot of solid research on orthorexia and how it overlaps with anorexia and compulsive exercise. You can help by being alert to identifying students exhibiting symptoms such as weight loss, fatigue, distress about diet and food, and accumulation of food rules. If you suspect someone is at risk you can ask:

- Do you spend most of your free time thinking about food rules?
- Have you had to avoid meals with friends and family because of your food rules?
- Are other people commenting about your food rules?

The answers to these questions can be used to begin to help the student challenge his/her food rules and expand food choices. Be sure to refer for medical follow up to rule out malnutrition or associated medical problems. A Registered Dietitian Nutritionist can help with assuring balance and increasing variety.

References:

Bratman, Steven. Orthorexia: An Update. <http://www.orthorexia.com/orthorexia-an-update/> Accessed 2/10/17.

Dunn TM and Bratman S. On orthorexia nervosa: A review of the literature and proposed diagnostic criteria. Eating Behaviors. 2006; 21:11-17.

McQuillan S. Orthorexia: The Other Eating Disorder. <https://www.qualityhealth.com/eating-nutrition-articles/orthorexia-eating-disorder> Accessed 2/10/17.

Rollin M. When Eating Right Goes Wrong: Orthorexia, Eating Disorders, and Psychopathology. SCAN Symposium presentation, May 2015, Colorado Springs, CO.

Concerned that Your Healthy Eating Has Gone too Far?

Are your students struggling to make sense of current diet trends? Kathleen Searles has answers for their questions about gluten free, paleo, vegan and other diets and simple strategies to eat healthier and perform better. Contact ksearles@lunchbox-nutritionist.com to schedule "American Diet Trends" for YOUR school or class.

Quote of the Month:

"You can't hate yourself healthy. But you can choose to treat your body with kindness, love and respect throughout your whole life."

– Rebecca Scritchfield, RDN

Kathleen Searles provides consulting services to private secondary schools. She is available to speak to students, faculty, coaches, etc. on a variety of general and sports nutrition topics. With over 30 years of experience in the boarding school environment, she is ready to tailor nutrition messages to your school's needs.

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