



How to:
Integrate Intuitive Eating
Concepts with Sports Nutrition

Heather Caplan RD
heathercaplan.com



They're not mutually exclusive.

Sports nutrition provides a foundation of evidence-based practices to help athletes fuel for their sport.

Intuitive Eating provides a foundation of evidence-based practices to help anyone develop trust with their body, and food.

**What do we
know about
Sports Nutrition?**

Fuel an active lifestyle.

- Fuel before, during, and after exercise (as applicable)
- Meet daily energy needs
- Maintain all aspects of health (e.g. RED-S)
- Use known nutrition guidelines to help an athlete with all of the above

Any dietitian is qualified to give sports nutrition advice. Use available resources through SCAN, the Academy, and colleagues.

Athletes at risk of disordered eating.

In surveys of both high school and collegiate female athletes, over 30 percent presented as at risk for disordered eating.

Risk factors: endurance sports, sports that emphasize appearance, overvalued belief that lower body weight will improve performance.

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

has a collection of prevention and educational tools for coaches.

Both active men and women should be aware of **RED-S*** and it's associated long-term health risks.

***RED-S:**

Relative Energy Deficiency Syndrome



**How can we
screen for
Sport-specific
Orthorexia and
RED-S?**



Meet a collegiate runner:

Division-1 cross country runner.

Senior year.

Hypothalamic amenorrhea, low body weight.

Stress fracture.

Sought help for sports nutrition guidance,
acknowledged presence of ED.

Studying nutrition and exercise science.

Go beyond Sports Nutrition.

Get comfortable addressing the root of disordered, restrictive eating patterns.

- Increase energy intake
- Identify food rules (and source)
- Reduce, or cease exercise.
- Educate with sports nutrition and intuitive eating principles

“I am so relieved and just happy to be HEALTHY! Definitely excited to slowly get back into some running! But this time doing everything in a very healthy manner.”

Sport-specific Orthorexia

Rigid food rules, healthism, and restrictive eating patterns all related to performance.

Signs and symptoms:

- Low energy intake
 - Preoccupation with food
 - Constant health concerns
 - Elimination of foods/groups
 - Social isolation, changes in relationships
 - Interest in what others are eating
 - Chronic food logging
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RED-S, fka Female Athlete Triad.

Relative energy deficiency syndrome.

- Low energy availability
- Loss of bone mineral density
- High risk of injury
- Amenorrhea (loss of menses)
- Decreased performance

This condition isn't specific to collegiate, elite, or professional athletes. Recreational athletes, or active individuals, are also at risk for RED-S/FAT.

Recreational athletes
may underestimate
their needs and downplay
their training, but still
impose rigid food rules.



Meet a former elite

Now running recreationally.

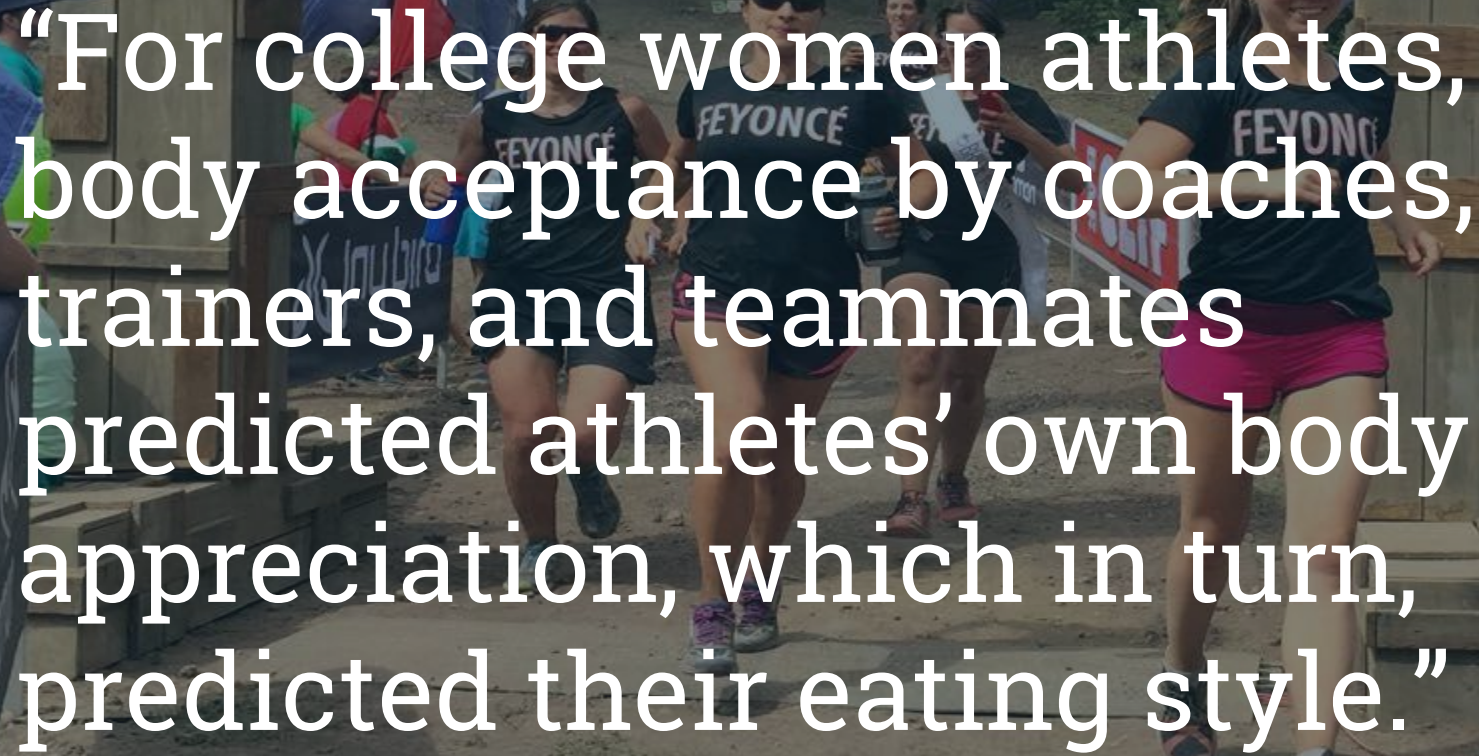
Amenorrhea, 6 years.

Low body weight.

No current or recent injuries.

Perfectionism, high achiever.

Rigid food rules, strong sense of superiority.



“For college women athletes, body acceptance by coaches, trainers, and teammates predicted athletes’ own body appreciation, which in turn, predicted their eating style.”

Use screening protocols to assess if your athlete needs a higher level of care or treatment.

If appropriate, take the next step: introduce core concepts of Intuitive Eating.

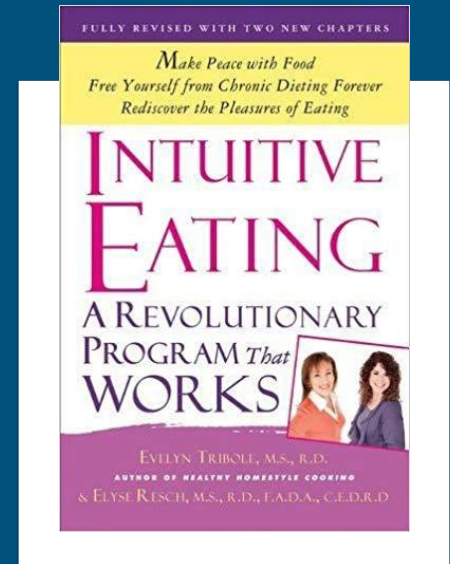
What is Intuitive Eating?

An Adaptive Eating Style

Centered around both physical needs and interoceptive awareness.

“Athletes described feeling liberated with regards to their eating following retirement from sport, and for some this included an alleviation of disordered eating practices.”

[Learning to eat again: Intuitive eating practices among retired female collegiate athletes.](#)



Not a 10-step program.

While there are 10 principles of Intuitive Eating, it's not a clearly defined plan for everyone.

- Meet a client where they are
- Understand their lifestyle
- Identify their intake and output
- Screen for disordered eating patterns

“I have learned to be more in tune with what my body needs and not fret about numbers. I have experienced more energy for both my workouts and the day in general.”

Fit Fueling participant

It's all about trust.

Developing rapport, and trust, with your client is Step 1.

Then, they must re-learn how to trust their body, and it's many signs, signals, and cues.

OKAY...
How does
Intuitive Eating
work with Sports
Nutrition?

What we know:

Sports Nutrition is an evidence-based practice designed to help athletes perform their best.

- Meet energy needs
- Provide nutrition before and after exercise
- Use latest research to provide performance boosts with nutrition science
- Keep an athlete healthy

Intuitive Eating allows us to teach nutrition science in a way that addresses an individual's physical *and* emotional health.

Re: It's all about trust.

An athlete has to learn to trust their training program, coach/mentor, and their body.

With nutrition, they should learn to trust their body to adapt, adjust, and excel with more food flexibility and your guidance.

Intuitive Eating Principles

Ditch the
Diet
Mentality

Learn to
Honor Hunger
and Fullness

Practice
Food Flexibility
and Satisfaction

The Diet Mentality

A rigid mindset that projects morality onto food, and food-related behaviors.

- Identify athlete's perception of "nutrition" and health
- Identify athlete's food rules
- Identify ways in which an athlete's performance will benefit from rejecting a diet mentality

Learn to Honor Hunger

Some clients have a hard time identifying both physical and psychological signs of hunger. Other times, hunger is ignored due to rigid food rules and restrictions.

- Assess presence of normal hunger cues
- Don't ignore any signs of hunger
- Practice “practical hunger” often (See also: Gentle Nutrition)
- Fuel frequently throughout the day

Learn to Feel Fullness

Fullness is something that many clients fear, or associate with eating “too much.” Learning an appropriate level of fullness is a process.

- Physical sense of fullness is more widely recognized
- Acknowledge fullness, or lack thereof, after meals
- Recognize how fullness may be used to restrict intake

Practice Food Flexibility

Food Flexibility (or “Making Peace With Food”) provides a way to practice flexibility in all aspects of an athlete’s routine.

- Identify, and begin to question, rigid food rules.
- Break up routine and food habits.
- Increase athlete’s variety of food and food experiences.

Practice Satisfaction

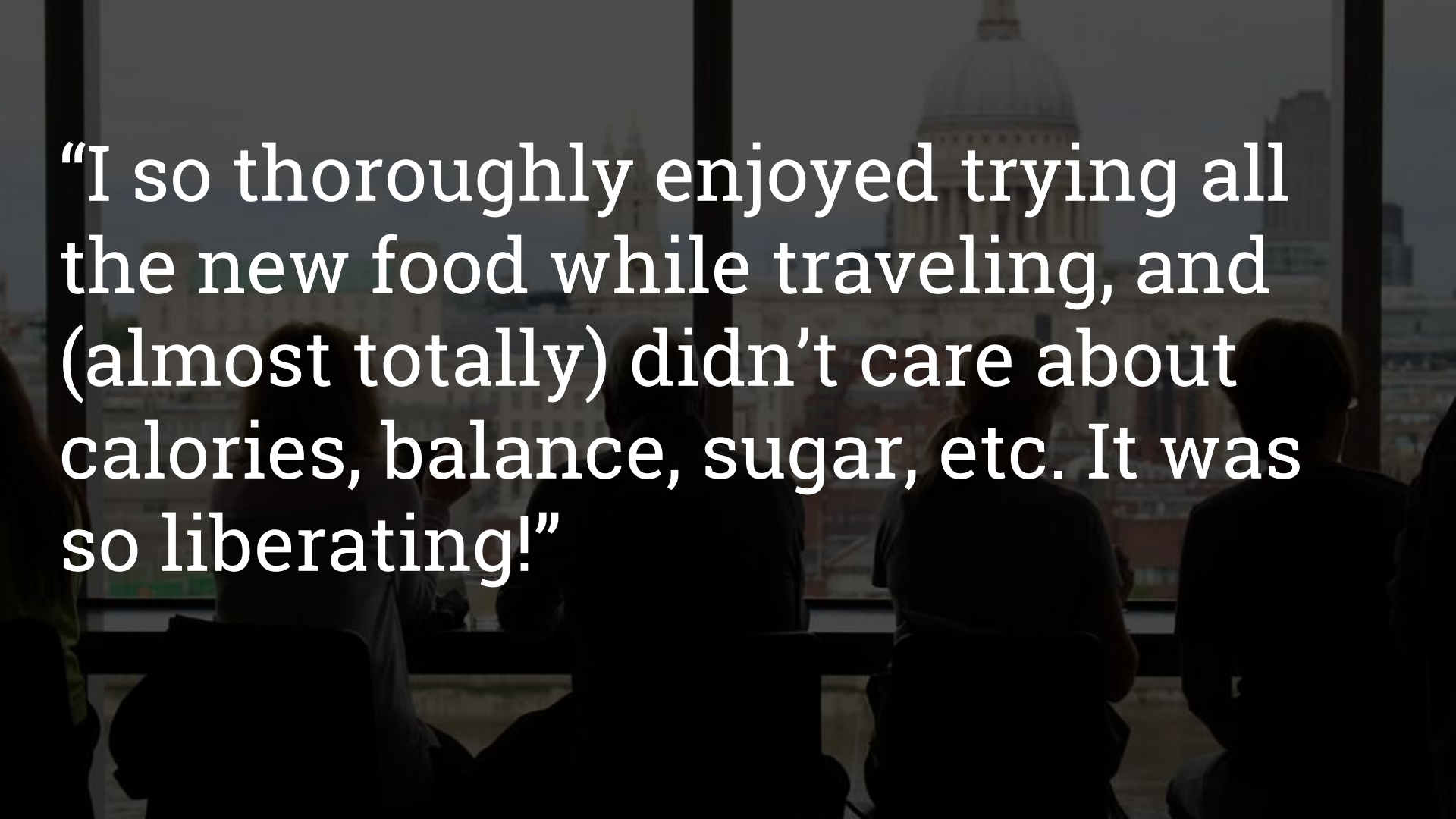
Satisfaction with food is considered the “hub” of Intuitive Eating. It can also be a turning point for an athlete’s stamina in sport.

- As food rules are challenged, work on identifying a sense of satisfaction with food experiences.
- Educate with gentle nutrition to provide more satisfying, and satiating, food options.

Integrate Gentle Nutrition

With most clients, gentle nutrition is one of the last parts of an IE process. With sports nutrition, it's integrated early and often to address the athlete's needs.

- Fueling before, sometimes during, and after workouts
- Practical hunger to support activity level and needs
- Promote nutrition to support cardio and strength activities
- Address supplements as needed

A group of people are silhouetted against a large window, sitting on a balcony or terrace. They are looking out at a city skyline. In the background, a prominent building with a large dome is visible, likely a state capitol building. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting it might be dusk or dawn.

“I so thoroughly enjoyed trying all the new food while traveling, and (almost totally) didn’t care about calories, balance, sugar, etc. It was so liberating!”

**Assess an athlete's
attitude toward food.**

**Screen for eating
disorders and body
image issues.**

**Integrate core
concepts of Intuitive
Eating to support
sports nutrition.**

Thank you!

Heather Caplan, RD heather@heathercaplan.com

@heatherdcRD (Twitter, Instagram)

- FitFueling.com
- Weight Inclusive Nutrition & Dietetics events:
weightinclusiveconference.com
- [RD Real Talk](#) podcast
- Lane 9 Project (lane9project.org)