

Athletic Energy Deficit Prevention Project Theory of Change

WHO IS AFFECTED

Young female athletes, including young and active girls, ages 10-18 who may become at risk for athletic energy deficit syndrome.

THE NEED

A significant percentage of young female athletes are at risk for athletic energy deficit (AED) syndrome, putting them in danger of a lifetime of bone health issues.

Limited Nutritional Intake

[Intentional or unintentional behaviors that result in inadequate nutrient and energy intakes relative to energy needs]

Energy Deficits

[High levels of energy expenditure that exceed limited nutrient and energy intakes]

Suppressed Physiological Functioning

[Processes essential for growth, development, bone and reproductive health, and optimal performance]

THE DESIRED IMPACT

To encourage a generation of young female athletes to be strong, healthy, and competitive for a lifetime. The AED Prevention Project aims to improve bone acquisition and reduce other complications that result from athletic energy deficit syndrome and poor nutrition.

STRATEGIES

Young Female Athletes

- Involve girls in health education clubs, focus groups, and the media to help inform message development
- Launch an Ambassador Program of young athletes who have recovered from AED to share their experiences and serve as spokeswomen
- Promote positive role models who communicate the connection between good nutrition, menstruation, and performance
- Create websites and other tools to help support girls

Families and Coaches

- Develop guides to serve as practical tools on how to recognize the syndrome and intervene
- Promote nutrition, training & healthy development for young female athletes
- Disseminate messages to emphasize the importance of normal onset of menses and regular cycles
- Encourage parents and networks of coaches to become advocates for healthy training regimens and nutrition

Healthcare Providers

- Enhance pre-participation physicals to include questions focused on AED
- Physicians provide education and encourage girls to identify and address any menstrual irregularities, particularly if menstruation does not begin by age 15.

OUTCOMES

Young Female Athletes will:

- Have normal menstrual cycles and reduced incidence of poor bone development, stress fractures, and early onset osteoporosis
- Understand and embrace the importance of a healthy diet and adequate food intake for growth and bone development, reproductive function and optimal athletic performance
- Utilize their families, coaches, and physicians as positive support systems
- Educate the public about athletic energy deficit

Families and Coaches of young female athletes will:

- Use provided tools to recognize risk factors and promote healthy behaviors
- Understand that menstrual abnormalities, especially the absence of menstruation upon reaching 15 years of age, may be a possible sign that AED syndrome might be present in a competitive girl athlete
- Participate in the solution as AED prevention advocates and assist young female athletes to balance nutrition, energy intake, exercise/training and rest

Healthcare Providers will:

- Translate science into action to ensure an evidenced-based educational campaign
- Take an active role in educating active young females about healthy eating behaviors, good nutrition, exercise, and body image
- Provide ongoing monitoring of young athletes and take action when risk factors are present

KEY MESSAGES

- The Athletic Energy Deficit Prevention Project translates the science behind the AED syndrome into action through strategies that encourage awareness, prevention, early intervention, and appropriate treatment.
- Delaying menstruation can delay growth. Delaying normal growth more than 2 years can suppress the development of strong, healthy bones. Strong bones prevent fractures that put health and athletic performance at risk.
- With the right amount of exercise, balanced nutrition, energy intake, and rest girls can develop regular menstrual cycles and strong bones – the prescription for a competitive edge today and for the future.
- The Athletic Energy Deficit Prevention Project works with partners to support athletic performance and competitive advantage while promoting the healthy development of young female athletes for a lifetime.