



Eating Disorder Education for Dancers, Teachers and Families

Eating Disorder – What is it?

Eating disorder is a biopsychosocial disorder, which can have life-threatening consequences for dancers. It is a complex manifestation of biological, psychological and social factors.

It is common among dancers to restrict their energy intake and this can lead to poor macro- and micro-nutrient status. Suboptimal nutrition and nutritional deficiencies can then lead to bigger issues including injuries and general overall poor performance. The reasons for the food and energy restriction are many, with the main one being the desire to control their physiques to achieve “the ideal dancer’s body”.

On top of this, dancers, especially those who are considered ‘elite’, often possess personality traits which can make them vulnerable to eating disorders. These include, but not limited to, perfectionism, heightened sensitivity and being ‘people pleasers’ or putting others first before themselves.

The prevalence of eating disorders is higher among dancers than non-dancers, which may be partly due to the dance culture’s physical, aesthetic and psychological demands. Although the exact rates of EDs are not clarified, the overall prevalence of EDs is 16.4% in ballet dancers (compared to 12% in non-dancers); 4% for anorexia nervosa, 2% for bulimia, and 14.9% for eating disorders not otherwise specified.

It is vital that all dancers, their teachers and families have the correct information as this will help you to prevent eating disorders from developing, as well as to detect early, seek the right help, and support appropriately and effectively when your child, student, or a friend is in treatment.

Please read through our series of resources, ***Eating Disorder Education for Dancers, Teachers and Families***, to equip yourself with the right knowledge and skills in this area.

Arcelus, Jon & Witcomb, Gemma & Mitchell, Alex. (2014). Prevalence of Eating Disorders amongst Dancers: A Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis. *European eating disorders review : the journal of the Eating Disorders Association*. 22. 10.1002/erv.2271.
Sousa, Mónica & Carvalho, Pedro & Moreira, Pedro & Teixeira, Vitor. (2013). Nutrition and Nutritional Issues for Dancers. *Medical problems of performing artists*. 28. 119-23.