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## ADDING INSECURITY TO INJURY: RISK FACTORS FOR DISORDERED EATING AMONG COMPETITIVE RUNNERS

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Running has a reputation for improving physical and mental health. However, competitive runners experience both elevated rates of injury and disordered eating behavior, which indicates that competitive running may have some detrimental impacts. Is there a connection between competitive running, injury, and eating behaviors? Could injuries be a potential trigger for disordered eating in runners? I found extensive data had been published on injury and disordered eating as they relate to running, but not in conjunction with one another. To explore this potential connection, I conducted a survey of 136 Division III college runners in the University Athletic Association who had experienced injury in their collegiate careers, which addressed changes in social behaviors, moods, self-perception, and eating behaviors while injured. An alarming 9.2% of those surveyed reported that they experienced disordered/restrictive eating behavior while injured that was not pre-existing. My research found that competitive runners and individuals with eating disorders tend to base their self-esteem upon external validation. In the case of a runner, this validation comes from athletic performance. When an injury challenges the athlete's ability to perform, it may also challenge her self-esteem, which can lead to disordered eating. Additionally, restrictive eating behaviors may be intensified by cultural pressure to attain an ultra-lean "runner's body."