Objective: Use the EAT-26 to investigate eating behaviors/attitudes differences between sports and the influence of exercise on these behaviors/trends using the EAT-26.

Design: Coaches received a cover letter, instructions for distribution, a letter for athletes stating purpose of the study, an Eating Attitudes Test -26 (EAT-26) survey for each participant, and a postage-paid envelope for each athlete to return survey. Enclosed postage paid envelope was used to mail the survey directly to researchers to eliminate contact with coaches.

Subjects: 322 females, ages 18 to 22, participating on 124 randomly selected Pennsylvania NCAA athletic teams. 16 NCAA sports were represented.

Measurements: Subjects completed the EAT-26 that assesses trends/behaviors toward food, eating, and exercise. Pearson Correlations, Chi-Squares, and Independent T-tests were performed. Bonferroni corrections were made; therefore, significance was set at $p \leq .003$, $p \leq .01$, and $p \leq .002$.

Results: 18.7% reported bingeing episodes. To control weight, 7% reported using purging and 16.5% reported using laxatives/diet pills/diuretics within the last 6 months. A correlation ($<.3$) was found with respondent’s highest reported weight and the total score. Chi-Square Test was significant ($p \leq .01$) between whether the subjects went on eating binges and used purging to control their weight, and between whether subjects purged to control their weight and their use of laxatives/diet pills/diuretics. The “at risk” variable was significant with whether the subjects used purging/laxatives/diet pills/diuretics to control their weight, bingeing episodes, and a history of treatment for an eating disorder (ED). A significant Independent t-test found a difference between individual and team sports with respect to their current, highest, and lowest body weights.

Conclusions: The results are quite alarming. Young, confident, athletically oriented women are having problems dealing with the societal pressures. Our results lead us to believe these women may be using excessive calorie restriction as a form of weight control. Approximately one-third of the participants in this study are using exercise as a form of unhealthy weight control. Not known is why 55.2% of the females work out in excess. This need to workout supports the idea of the pressure women feel to maintain an “appropriate body weight.” Equally disturbing is the number of women who scored in the ‘at risk’ range on the EAT-26. Finally, individuals who self-reported a history of treatment for an ED reported using laxatives/diet pills/diuretics within the last six months; therefore their treatments were not effective since these behaviors are still occurring.

Key words: EAT-26, Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, athlete, exercise