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Definition and outcome of a curriculum to prevent disordered eating and body-shaping drug use.

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Almost one half of male and female students participate in high school-sponsored athletics, and high school also is a time when classroom health promotion curricula are less effective. The Athletes Training and Learning to Avoid Steroids is a sport team-centered drug-use prevention program for male high school athletes, which has been shown to reduce alcohol and illicit drug use. Just as anabolic steroid use is associated with male athletes, female sport participants may be at a greater risk for disordered eating and body-shaping drug use. Extending sport team-centered programs to young women athletes required defining and ranking factors related to developing those harmful behaviors. Survey results from a cross-sectional cohort of female middle and high school student athletes were used to identify and prioritize potential curriculum components, including mood and self-esteem, norms of behavior, perceptions of healthy body weight, effects of media depictions of women, and societal pressures to be thin. The derived sport team-centered program was prospectively assessed among a second group of female student athletes from 18 high schools, randomized to receive the intervention or the usual care control condition. The Athletes Targeting Healthy Exercise and Nutrition Alternatives (ATHENA) intervention is a scripted, coach-facilitated, peer-led 8-session program, which was incorporated into a team's usual training activities. The ATHENA program significantly altered the targeted risk factors and reduced ongoing and new use of diet pills and body-shaping substances (amphetamines, anabolic steroids, and sport supplements). These findings illustrate the utility of a structured process to define curriculum content, and the program's positive results also confirm the sport team's potential as a vehicle to effectively deter health-harming behaviors.

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