

Fitness culture and dysfunctional eating behaviors: challenges for the nutritionist's role in public health: a literature review

Cultura fitness e comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais: desafios para a atuação do nutricionista na saúde coletiva: uma revisão de literatura

Cultura fitness y comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales: desafíos para la actuación del nutricionista en la salud colectiva: una revisión de la literatura

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Abstract:

Introduction: Adherence to fitness culture, driven by digital media, influences eating patterns and the relationship with body image, especially among young people. Although associated with well-being and success, this culture can favor dysfunctional eating behaviors, such as food restriction, orthorexia, and binge eating, in addition to stimulating fad diets and misinformation, with negative impacts on mental and nutritional health. Epidemiological data indicate a high prevalence of eating disorders, especially among women and young people. Given this, nutritionists play a relevant role in nutritional education and the prevention of these disorders, even though they face challenges such as media influence, the normalization of dysfunctional behaviors, and the need for interdisciplinary action. Analyzing the evidence on this relationship is essential to strengthen health promotion strategies. **Objective:** To analyze the relationship between fitness culture, dysfunctional eating behaviors, and the challenges for the nutritionist's role in public health. **Methodology:** This is an integrative, qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory literature review that sought to analyze the relationship between fitness culture, dysfunctional eating behaviors, and challenges for nutritionists in public health. The search was conducted in the SciELO, PubMed, CAPES, and RBNE databases, using descriptors in Portuguese and English combined with the AND and OR operators, including primary studies published between 2022 and 2026. Due to the scarcity of specific studies, works on body image, eating disorders, restrictive practices, media, nutrition, and primary care were also considered. After the selection stages, seven articles comprised the final sample, analyzed descriptively and critically. **Results and Discussion:** The analyzed studies indicate that fitness culture significantly influences the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, especially through the aesthetic valorization of the lean and muscular body. The pressure to conform to beauty standards, the intense use of social media, and the ideal of a "healthy body" favor restrictive, compulsive, and obsessive practices associated with body dissatisfaction, binge eating, and orthorexia nervosa. Many of these behaviors are socially valued, making early identification difficult. The literature also points to challenges for nutritionists in public health, such as media influence, normalization of eating disorders, lack of protocols, gaps in training, and the need for interdisciplinary action. The findings reinforce the importance of food education actions, health promotion, and critical approaches to the discourses of digital media. **Conclusion:** The review showed that fitness culture influences the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, such as restrictions, compulsions, and obsessions, associated with the pursuit of the ideal body. The pressure to conform to beauty standards, amplified by social media and the discourse of a "healthy lifestyle," normalizes these practices and makes early identification difficult. The phenomenon affects different population groups and poses challenges to Primary Care, such as the absence of protocols, limitations in professional training, and difficulties in recognizing these behaviors. The role of the nutritionist requires approaches that consider the social, cultural, and subjective aspects of food, with emphasis on Food and Nutrition Education

in promoting autonomy and combating misinformation. Furthermore, there is a need to expand scientific production and strengthen health promotion strategies in Primary Care.

Keywords:

Fitness culture; eating disorder; nutritionist; eating behavior; public health.

Resumo:

Introdução: A adesão à cultura fitness, impulsionada pelas mídias digitais, influencia padrões alimentares e a relação com a imagem corporal, especialmente entre jovens. Embora associada ao bem-estar e sucesso, essa cultura pode favorecer comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais, como restrição alimentar, ortorexia e compulsão, além de estimular dietas da moda e desinformação, com impactos negativos à saúde mental e nutricional. Dados epidemiológicos indicam alta prevalência de transtornos alimentares, sobretudo entre mulheres e jovens. Diante disso, o nutricionista tem papel relevante na educação alimentar e prevenção desses transtornos, ainda que enfrente desafios como a influência midiática, normalização de comportamentos disfuncionais e necessidade de atuação interdisciplinar. Analisar as evidências sobre essa relação é essencial para fortalecer estratégias de promoção da saúde. **Objetivo:** Analisar a relação entre a cultura fitness, os comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais e os desafios para a atuação do nutricionista na saúde coletiva. **Metodologia:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, qualitativa, descritiva e exploratória, que buscou analisar a relação entre cultura fitness, comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais e desafios para a atuação do nutricionista na saúde coletiva. A busca foi realizada nas bases SciELO, PubMed, CAPES e RBNE, com descritores em português e inglês combinados pelos operadores AND e OR, incluindo estudos primários publicados entre 2022 e 2026. Devido à escassez de estudos específicos, também foram considerados trabalhos sobre imagem corporal, transtornos alimentares, práticas restritivas, mídia, nutrição e atenção primária. Após as etapas de seleção, sete artigos compuseram a amostra final, analisados de forma descritiva e crítica. **Resultados e Discussões:** Os estudos analisados indicam que a cultura fitness influencia significativamente o desenvolvimento de comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais, especialmente pela valorização estética do corpo magro e musculoso. A pressão estética, o uso intenso das redes sociais e o ideal de “corpo saudável” favorecem práticas restritivas, compulsivas e obsessivas, associadas à insatisfação corporal, compulsão alimentar e ortorexia nervosa. Muitos desses comportamentos são socialmente valorizados, dificultando sua identificação precoce. A literatura também aponta desafios para o nutricionista na saúde coletiva, como influência midiática, normalização de disfunções alimentares, ausência de protocolos, lacunas na formação e necessidade de atuação interdisciplinar. Os achados reforçam a importância de ações de educação alimentar, promoção da saúde e abordagens críticas frente aos discursos das mídias digitais. **Conclusão:** A revisão evidenciou que a cultura fitness influencia o desenvolvimento de comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais, como restrições, compulsões e obsessões, associadas à busca pelo corpo ideal. A pressão estética, amplificada pelas redes sociais e pelo discurso do “estilo de vida saudável”, normaliza essas práticas e dificulta sua identificação precoce. O fenômeno afeta diferentes grupos populacionais e impõe desafios à Atenção Primária, como ausência de protocolos, limitações na formação profissional e dificuldades no reconhecimento desses comportamentos. A atuação do nutricionista requer abordagens que considerem aspectos sociais, culturais e subjetivos da alimentação, com destaque para a Educação Alimentar e Nutricional na promoção da autonomia e no enfrentamento da desinformação. Reforça-se, ainda, a necessidade de ampliar a produção científica e fortalecer estratégias de promoção da saúde na Atenção Básica.

Palavras-chave:

Cultura fitness; transtorno alimentar; nutricionista; comportamento alimentar; saúde coletiva.

Resumen:

La adhesión a la cultura fitness, impulsada por los medios digitales, influye en los patrones alimentarios y en la relación con la imagen corporal, especialmente entre los jóvenes. Aunque se asocia con el bienestar y el éxito, esta cultura puede favorecer comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales, como la restricción alimentaria, la ortorexia y los atracones, además de estimular dietas de moda y desinformación, con impactos negativos en la salud mental y nutricional. Los datos epidemiológicos indican una alta prevalencia de trastornos alimentarios, especialmente entre mujeres y jóvenes. Ante ello, el nutricionista desempeña un papel relevante en la educación alimentaria y en la prevención de estos trastornos, aunque enfrenta desafíos como la influencia de los medios, la normalización de comportamientos disfuncionales y la necesidad de una actuación interdisciplinaria. Analizar las evidencias sobre esta relación es esencial para fortalecer las estrategias de promoción de la salud. **Objetivo:** Analizar la relación entre la cultura fitness, los comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales y los desafíos para la actuación del nutricionista en la salud colectiva. **Metodología:** Se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura, cualitativa, descriptiva y exploratoria, que buscó analizar la relación entre la cultura fitness, los comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales y los desafíos para la actuación del nutricionista en la salud colectiva. La búsqueda se realizó en las bases SciELO, PubMed, CAPES y RBNE, utilizando descriptores en portugués e inglés combinados mediante los operadores AND y OR, incluyendo estudios primarios publicados entre 2022 y 2026. Debido a la escasez de estudios específicos, también se consideraron trabajos sobre imagen corporal, trastornos alimentarios, prácticas restrictivas, medios de comunicación, nutrición y atención primaria. Tras las etapas de selección, siete artículos conformaron la muestra final, analizados de manera descriptiva y crítica. **Resultados y discusión:** Los estudios analizados indican que la cultura fitness influye significativamente en el desarrollo de comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales, especialmente por la valorización estética del cuerpo delgado y musculoso. La presión estética, el uso intenso de las redes sociales y el ideal del “cuerpo saludable” favorecen prácticas restrictivas, compulsivas y obsesivas, asociadas con la insatisfacción corporal, los atracones y la ortorexia nerviosa. Muchos de estos comportamientos son socialmente valorados, dificultando su identificación temprana. La literatura también señala desafíos para el nutricionista en la salud colectiva, como la influencia mediática, la normalización de las disfunciones alimentarias, la ausencia de protocolos, las lagunas en la formación y la necesidad de una actuación interdisciplinaria. Los hallazgos refuerzan la importancia de las acciones de educación alimentaria, promoción de la salud y enfoques críticos frente a los discursos difundidos en los medios digitales. **Conclusión:** La revisión evidenció que la cultura fitness influye en el desarrollo de comportamientos alimentarios disfuncionales, como restricciones, compulsiones y obsesiones, asociados con la búsqueda del cuerpo ideal. La presión estética, amplificada por las redes sociales y por el discurso del “estilo de vida saludable”, normaliza estas prácticas y dificulta su identificación temprana. El fenómeno afecta a diferentes grupos poblacionales e impone desafíos a la Atención Primaria, como la ausencia de protocolos, las limitaciones en la formación profesional y las dificultades para reconocer estos comportamientos. La actuación del nutricionista requiere enfoques que consideren los aspectos sociales, culturales y subjetivos de la alimentación, con énfasis en la Educación Alimentaria y Nutricional para promover la autonomía y enfrentar la desinformación. Asimismo, se refuerza la necesidad de ampliar la producción científica y fortalecer las estrategias de promoción de la salud en la Atención Primaria.

Palabras clave:

Cultura fitness; trastorno alimentario; nutricionista; comportamiento alimentario; salud colectiva.

INTRODUCTION

The growing adoption of *fitness culture* raises questions about its impacts on diet. In recent decades, its expansion, driven primarily by digital media, has significantly influenced dietary patterns and irregular behaviors related to body image, especially among young people and adults (Marques; Dias, 2024).

In recent years, there has been an intensification of the appreciation of body aesthetics and physical performance, driven by the development of social media and the circulation of idealized body standards, where the body is reinforced as a social construct (Resende, N., *et al.* 2025). In this context, the term "*fitness culture*" is consolidated, characterized by the appreciation of a lifestyle based on physical exercise, "perfect" nutrition, and the pursuit of a lean and/or muscular body, these linked to the notion of well-being, happiness, and success (Copetti ; Quironga , 2018).

fitness culture ," associated with improved quality of life, can also contribute to the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, understood as inadequate practices related to food, such as food restriction and concern about the quality of food consumed, where there is a division between foods considered "good" and "bad" (Costa; Abonizio , 2023). In this scenario, orthorexia nervosa stands out, marked by an excessive concern with a "clean ," "pure ," and "healthy" diet, established by dietary rigidity and exclusion of food groups important for human development, in addition to intense anxiety and suffering during meals, indicating a high risk to overall health (Koven ; Abry , 2015).

In parallel, there is a growing search for socially valued aesthetic standards, leading young people and adults to adopt restrictive eating practices without professional guidance, favoring cycles of binge eating, a disorder characterized by uncontrolled intake even when there is no physical hunger , negatively contributing to the relationship with food, where hunger becomes guided by inflexible behaviors, feelings of guilt, and social pressure regarding body image, especially among frequent users of digital media (Heringer, P., *et al.* 2023).

Recent evidence suggests that physically active individuals, especially adult women, exhibit behaviors such as food restriction and emotional eating, indicating that adopting this lifestyle does not necessarily guarantee a healthy relationship with food (Resende, N., *et al.*

2025). Furthermore, studies indicate that these behaviors can emerge in childhood, associated with body dissatisfaction and sociocultural influence (Appolinario ; Claudino, 2001).

From an epidemiological point of view, data published in 2022 by the Brazilian Psychiatric Association (ABP) state that eating disorders, including anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating, affect approximately 70 million people worldwide and 15 million in Brazil. A higher prevalence is observed in women and young people, with risk signs in adolescents, frequently associated with body dissatisfaction and sociocultural influence, reinforcing that this behavior begins early in life, highlighting the importance of the topic (Canuto, 2022).

fitness culture stands out as one of the factors associated with the development of these inadequate eating behaviors. From this perspective, it is observed that this culture can stimulate the adoption of severe food restriction practices, in the pursuit of a so-called "clean" diet and in adherence to diets considered "trendy," widely disseminated in the media by digital influencers without scientific basis (Costa; Abonízio , 2023). Such practices can negatively impact the nutritional status of the population, favoring nutritional deficiencies that compromise mental health and increase the risk of developing eating disorders. (Costa; Abonízio , 2023)

Given this reality, the importance of the nutritionist's contribution to primary care is emphasized, whose role goes beyond prescribing an appropriate and individualized dietary plan (Pedrosa; Franco, 2022). Their role involves promoting a balanced relationship with food, combating misinformation, and valuing culturally appropriate and sustainable eating practices (Pedrosa; Franco, 2022). In this context, nutritionists face significant challenges, such as the pressure exerted by fitness culture, the normalization of dysfunctional eating habits, and the need to consider emotional and social aspects in care (Pedrosa; Franco, 2022). Thus, although *fitness culture* is frequently associated with the promotion of well-being, it can also contribute to the adoption of inadequate eating practices, constituting a relevant problem for public health and highlighting the need for broader educational strategies and comprehensive care (Moraes; Maravalhas; Mourilhe , 2019).

Identifying the relationship between *fitness culture* and the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, as well as the main challenges for nutritionists in public health, is fundamental to improving health practices (Marques; Dias 2024). In this context, the increasing emphasis on aesthetic body standards, physical performance, and the so-called "perfect diet," widely disseminated by social media, has contributed to the adoption of rigid, restrictive, and often harmful eating practices (Marques; Dias 2024). Thus, it is observed that such sociocultural influences directly impact food choices and can favor the emergence of dysfunctional behaviors, requiring a broader view of the eating process (Marques; Dias 2024).

However, despite the relevance of this scenario, the nutritionist's role still faces significant challenges, including insufficient specific training to deal with dysfunctional eating behaviors, the influence of conflicting media discourses, the difficulty individuals have in adhering to more flexible guidelines, and the limited number of strategies within public health that include effective preventive actions (Pereira, 2022). Furthermore, the complexity of these behaviors demands an interdisciplinary approach, which does not always occur in a structured way within health services (Pereira, 2022).

In this context, it becomes fundamental to analyze and synthesize the evidence available in the literature regarding this topic, aiming to contribute to the strengthening of more integrated, critical, and effective practices in promoting health and preventing food-related illnesses. To this end, the influence of fitness culture in disseminating aesthetic standards and encouraging practices that can favor the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors is considered. This review also seeks to discuss the implications of this scenario for the nutritionist's role in the field of public health, especially regarding the development of strategies aimed at promoting adequate and healthy eating.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an integrative literature review, qualitative in nature, descriptive and exploratory, developed with the objective of gathering and analyzing scientific evidence, including the definition of the following. **Guiding question: "What is the relationship between *fitness* culture and the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, and what are the challenges for nutritionists in the context of public health?"**

Scientific) database. Electronic Library Online), PubMed (US National Library), CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), and the Brazilian Journal of Sports Nutrition (RBNE). For the search strategy, descriptors in Portuguese and English were used, combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR, in order to increase the sensitivity of the search. Three to five main descriptors were used, such as: "*fitness culture*", "*eating disorders*", "*nutritionist*" and "*public health*". To narrow the search criteria, primary studies published between 2022 and 2026, available in Portuguese and English, that addressed the relationship between *fitness culture* and dysfunctional eating behaviors and the challenges for the work of public health nutritionists were filtered. Literature reviews, editorials, opinions, dissertations, event abstracts, letters to the editor, and primary articles published in

years prior to 2022 were excluded, as well as those that, even with the correct time frame, did not address the role of nutritionists in public health.

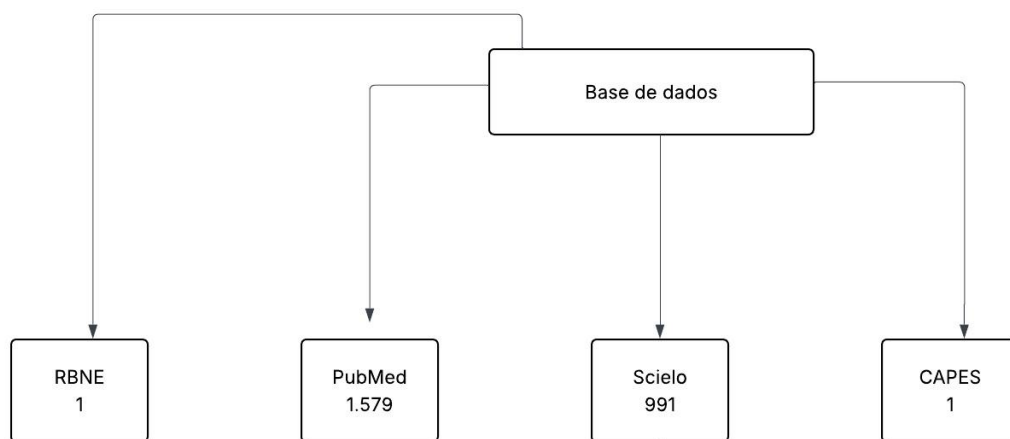
Given the limited number of studies directly related to the association between fitness culture, dysfunctional eating behaviors, and the role of nutritionists in public health, the research was expanded to include articles addressing body image, eating disorders, binge eating, restrictive eating practices, and the relationship between media and nutrition, provided they had an interface with health promotion and the nutritional status of the population.

Articles addressing multidisciplinary practice in eating disorders were also included, provided they considered aspects related to comprehensive care and health education. Furthermore, studies concerning the role of nutritionists in primary health care were considered, even when not linked to fitness culture, as long as they contributed to reflection on professional practice, preventive strategies, and the promotion of healthy eating habits. It is important to note that these studies were included because they presented issues directly related to the topic of eating disorders, thus ensuring their relevance to the proposed theme.

Initially, the process of identifying, selecting, and assessing the eligibility of studies was carried out, followed by the application of previously established inclusion and exclusion criteria. After this stage, the articles considered eligible were submitted for full-text reading to verify their suitability to the defined criteria. At the end of this process, 7 articles were selected to compose the final sample of this review. The included studies were analyzed descriptively and critically, considering the author, year of publication, objectives, methodology employed, and the main results found.

The steps for selecting the studies included in this review are presented in the flowchart below, adapted following the recommendations of the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) . The data extracted from the articles were organized into a table for better visualization and comparison of scientific evidence.

Figure 1 - Flowchart of the process of identifying, selecting, and including the scientific articles used in this review.





Source: developed by the authors, 2026.

During the investigation, 2,572 articles were found in the four databases searched: 1 in the Brazilian Journal of Sports Nutrition, 1,579 in PubMed , 991 in SciELO , and 1 in CAPES journals. After filtering for inclusion criteria, 548 articles remained. Only 58 were read in full, and an analysis of titles, abstracts, and results revealed that many did not meet the established inclusion criteria. Therefore, the inclusion criteria were cut off based on time, leaving... 7 articles that were considered potentially relevant to this review.

Table 1, described below, presents a compilation of the results from the 7 articles selected for this review, according to the criteria adopted in the research method. The summary includes relevant information from each study, such as authors, year of publication, title, type of study, objectives, and main results, allowing for the analysis of the scientific evidence found on fitness culture, dysfunctional eating behaviors, and the challenges for the nutritionist's practice in public health.

Table 1. Summary of articles analyzed for review.

Articles	Author, year publication to the , study location	Design, type of study and N	Study objectives	Methodology	Key findings
1	Leal, N. 2023 Ceará - Brazil	Descriptive exploratory study with qualitative approach qualitative N= 12 participants, There are 3 doctors, 3 nurses, 3 nutritionists, and 3 psychologists. active in primary health care.	The study sought comprehend the representations social by professionals da primary health care in the city of Sobral regarding disorders food .	Data collection was carried out between October 2022 and March 2023 using interviews with the participating professionals Moskovich 's theory of social representations, an analysis was then carried out using the collective subject discourse technique and software for data tabulation and processing.	The study revealed that professionals have a limited understanding of eating disorders, particularly those associated with weight, obesity, sadness, suffering, and binge eating. A disconnect between professionals and mental health was also observed, with reports of a lack of specific guidelines and support materials. The study demonstrates difficulties in the diagnosis, management, and care of patients with eating disorders, and also points to a need for professional training, ongoing care, and intersectoral actions in primary health care.

2	<p>Oliveira ML S <i>et al.</i> 2026</p> <p>Alagoas – Brazil</p>	<p>analytical – cross-sectional observational study</p> <p>N = students in the nutrition course</p>	<p>To investigate the association between food restriction and binge eating. feeding students of nutrition.</p>	<p>The study assessed nutrition students using questionnaires related to eating behavior, dietary restriction, risk for eating disorders, body image, and potential episodes of binge eating.</p>	<p>The study identified a significant association between food restriction and binge eating in nutrition students, showing that restrictive practices can promote the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors. These findings resonate with the context of fitness culture, as they reinforce the idea that the emphasis on certain body standards and the encouragement of restrictive practices, common in this environment, can contribute to the emergence of dysfunctional eating behaviors, representing a significant challenge for the role of nutritionists in public health.</p>
3	<p>Milk, MO <i>et al.</i> 2022</p> <p>Bahia – Brazil</p>	<p>Cross-sectional study .</p> <p>N = 46 adults</p>	<p>Investigate the prevalence of behaviors risk for orthorexia nervosa (ON) in corridors recreation is , exploring the relationship of these behaviors with anthropometric variables rich, socioeconomic nutritional</p>	<p>Recruitment took place between October and November 2022 through social media, running consultancies, and in-person events. anthropometric variables such as weight, height, and waist and hip circumference, in addition to body composition. sociodemographic and economic variables were classified according to the ABEP 2022 criteria. In addition, a 24-hour dietary recall and an Orthopedic Questionnaire (15) with a cutoff point</p>	<p>There was a significant association in people belonging to class B1 (upper-middle class) and B2 (middle class), suggesting that greater access to nutritional information and financial resources may increase the adoption of restrictive eating practices, this finding points to the social dimension of eating behaviors, indicating that the nutritionist's intervention should consider the socioeconomic profile as a risk variable and not just a protective one. Furthermore, the study identifies a dietary pattern rich in fruits and carbohydrates, but with a restriction of lipids, demonstrating how the pursuit of a diet perceived as healthy within this culture can paradoxically result in an unbalanced nutritional intake, challenging</p>



				below [a certain value] were conducted. 40 for risk classification.	the nutritionist to reconstruct distorted food narratives within the collective context.
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4	Sources, NT V <i>et al.</i> 2025 Paraíba – Brazil	Epidemiological research, descriptive, quantitative and cross-sectional N= 300 students	Assess the behavior risk factor for the development of disorders nutritional needs in students female students in health-related courses University and the Federal University of Campina Grande.	The study used an ORTO-15 questionnaire, translated and adapted into Portuguese, with multiple-choice questions about obsessive attitudes regarding the choice, preparation, and consumption of food. Data collection took place over six weeks in classrooms .	Of the 300 participants, 102 presented. risk behaviors for the development of eating disorders, highlighting an instability in the estimates and impact of the instrument used. The study reveals that the greatest vulnerability is found among young people, directly relating to the digital fitness culture where influencers are responsible for disseminating false content about nutrition, reinforcing the demand for food and nutrition education actions aimed at this audience. No direct relationship was found between BMI and dysfunctional and pathological obsessive eating behaviors. The article itself acknowledged that the ORTO-15 questionnaire presents psychometric inconsistencies and may be inadequate for distinguishing between healthy eating and pathological healthy eating.
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5	Toguc H,; Hokelek B. 2025 Malatya - Türkiye	Study transversal N = 651 young people	To examine the relationships between social media addiction and digital literacy in food. And self-stigma related to weight and food disorders.	Five instruments were used: a general information form containing gender, age, income, weight, and height, and the e-Healthy Eating Literacy Scale, which assesses deliverance in food. Healthy in the digital environment, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, which assesses addiction to social media, Orthorexia nervosa inventory (ONI), which assesses behaviors based on emotions and the harm related to them and Weight Related Self Stigma, which assesses	The study revealed that the association between social media addiction and obsessive eating behaviors highlights how fitness culture can be a vector for dysfunctional eating behaviors, placing nutritionists before a phenomenon that goes beyond the consulting room and requires a public health approach. The study demonstrates that traditional educational strategies can be a challenge for food and nutrition education in Primary Health Care. This study indicates that individuals with higher body weight are subject to greater social stigma and points to a risk factor to be addressed in health promotion actions. The greater exposure of women to an environment...
				about Personal devaluation and damage to one's image.	The digital use of nutritional and fitness content also reinforces the need for public health approaches with a gender perspective, recognizing that young women constitute a more vulnerable audience to media influence on eating behavior.

6	<p>Calpbini, P. 2025 Nevşehir - Türkiye</p>	<p>Descriptive and transversal study 200 N = pregnant women</p>	<p>To examine the effect of using social networks are trending towards eating behaviors dysfunctional in pregnant women, identifying media usage patterns social, level of tendency towards eating disorders and the degree of integration the networks predict to behaviors mistakes during pregnancy.</p>	<p>Three instruments were developed: Information form with 21 questions about socio-demographic and obstetric characteristics and 6 questions about the use of social networks, ORTO-11, Turkish version adapted from ORTO -15 and Social Media Integration. Scale , which assesses the emotional connection and integration with the routine use of social networks.</p>	<p>The study found a negative, yet statistically significant, correlation between greater use of social media and a higher tendency towards eating disorders, expanding the scope of action to public health and primary health care beyond those who practice physical exercise. The study also reveals that even when distrusting the information found on social media, women are still influenced by it, illustrating the paradox of digital literacy, where access to information does not guarantee critical thinking, demanding specific educational actions for the development of food autonomy in a context of high media exposure.</p>
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7	Cosh , M. S.,; Olson, J.; Tully , JP 2023 Australia	Observational study N= 197 individuals	Comprehend the orthorexia nervous disorders and eating disorders , assessing the nutritionist 's ability a in detecting the presence or absence of	Four validated instruments were used to measure orthorexia nervosa and related disorders. Eating habits Questionnaire , which assesses the subscales of orthorexia nervosa and healthy eating, the Orthorexia Nervosa Inventory , and the Eating Disorders. disorder examination questionnaire for	Orthorexia overlaps with eating disorders, reinforcing the idea that it should be screened for as part of the spectrum of disorders within the context of public health and not treated exclusively as a psychiatric phenomenon. The study indicates that not all concern about food quality is pathological, and culture can promote these adaptive behaviors as dysfunctional, although the authors acknowledge that the results are limited by...
			symptoms in addition to management encompasses the practical scope of nutrition clinical and collective.	symptom detection disorders dietary criteria include an additional BMI criterion below 18.5 kg/m2 and the revised obsessive compulsive inventory to assess the symptoms of eating disorders and thoughts Obsessive-compulsive disorders. The analysis was performed using ROC curves to determine the prevalence of these disorders. disorders food and the validity of diagnosis answering the question of whether the available instruments They manage	The absence of definitive diagnostic criteria demonstrates that this is one of the main obstacles to the nutritionist's work in primary health care, due to the lack of validated instruments and clinical consensus.



				To distinguish orthorexia from other disorders.	
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Source: developed by the authors, 2026

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

fitness culture directly influences the development and maintenance of dysfunctional eating behaviors, especially in contexts where the aesthetic value of a thin, muscular, and socially idealized body predominates. In general, the findings converge in demonstrating that aesthetic pressure, the intense use of social media, and the circulation of discourses linked to the ideal of a "healthy body" favor restrictive, compulsive, and obsessive eating practices. These aspects represent significant challenges for nutritionists in the field of public health, particularly regarding health promotion, disease prevention, and food and nutrition education.

The studies analyzed presented distinct methodological designs, encompassing observational, cross-sectional, epidemiological, and qualitative research, conducted with nutrition students, individuals who practice physical activity, pregnant women, and frequent users of social media. Although methodological and population differences are evident, the

results converge in indicating that fitness culture frequently associates health with body image and excessive dietary control, contributing to the normalization of dysfunctional eating behaviors and, consequently, hindering the early identification of these behaviors by health professionals.

The study by Oliveira *et al.* (2026), conducted with 133 Nutrition students in the state of Alagoas, investigated the association between food restriction, binge eating, and body image. The authors identified a significant association between restrictive practices and binge eating episodes, showing that academic environments linked to Nutrition can also favor dysfunctional relationships with food. Furthermore, students in more advanced stages of the course presented a higher frequency of binge eating episodes and greater body dissatisfaction, suggesting the influence of aesthetic and professional pressure exerted throughout their academic training. These findings are relevant to public health, as they demonstrate that future professionals in the field are also exposed to the impacts of fitness culture, a fact that can directly affect their future nutritional practices and approaches.

Similarly, Leite *et al.* (2022), when investigating recreational runners in Bahia, identified a high prevalence of risky eating behaviors and a significant influence of fitness culture on the participants' eating practices. The study showed a significant association between higher purchasing power, access to nutritional information, and the adoption of restrictive eating behaviors, indicating that the discourse of a "healthy lifestyle" can favor rigid and obsessive eating patterns. The authors also emphasize that a large part of these behaviors is socially valued and frequently interpreted as a healthy habit, which compromises preventive actions and hinders health surveillance strategies.

These results are consistent with the findings of Fontes *et al.* (2025), who evaluated 300 female university students in Paraíba and identified a high frequency of obsessive behaviors related to food. The study demonstrated that the intense consumption of *fitness* and nutritional content on social media was associated with an increased excessive concern about food.

"Clean" and healthy. The authors emphasize that digital influencers frequently disseminate information without scientific backing, reinforcing unrealistic body standards and inadequate eating behaviors, especially among young women. This scenario represents a significant challenge for public health, given the growing impact of digital media on shaping the population's eating habits.

In an international context, a study conducted in Turkey with 651 young people identified a significant association between social media addiction, inadequate digital literacy, and dysfunctional eating behaviors (Toguc ; Hokelek , 2025). The authors observed that

individuals more exposed to *fitness content* presented a higher risk of binge eating, excessive concern with body image, and greater internalization of unrealistic aesthetic standards. These findings reinforce the influence of digital media on the construction of body image and the development of eating practices that are detrimental to physical and mental health, demonstrating that the impacts of fitness culture also constitute a public health problem.

In line with these findings, a Turkish study conducted with 200 pregnant women showed a significant association between intensive use of social media and increased food anxiety, as well as the adoption of dysfunctional eating patterns during pregnancy (Calpbinici , P; 2025). The authors highlight that, even in a phase physiologically marked by bodily transformations, the aesthetic pressure conveyed by *fitness culture* continues to exert a negative influence on women's body image. These findings broaden the scope of the discussion to include population groups historically underrepresented in public health policies and prevention actions, signaling the need for specific approaches aimed at the pregnant population in the context of promoting health and adequate and healthy eating.

Another aspect of clinical and epidemiological relevance identified in the literature concerns orthorexia nervosa, a disorder characterized by a pathological obsession with the quality and purity of consumed foods, to the detriment of food pleasure and dietary flexibility. The cross-sectional study by Cosh , MS; Olson, J.; Tully , JP (2023), conducted in Australia with 197 participants, showed a significant association between orthorexia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, and other eating disorders. The authors demonstrated that behaviors initially perceived as expressions of dietary discipline or adherence to a healthy lifestyle can progress to markedly rigid, obsessive, and detrimental eating practices to the physical and mental health of individuals. This finding highlights one of the central mechanisms of contemporary fitness culture: the social valorization of potentially pathological behaviors when associated with the idea of performance, self-care, and healthy eating. This phenomenon poses concrete challenges to the early recognition of these cases within the scope of Primary Health Care, compromising the comprehensiveness of care and reinforcing the invisibility of eating disorders in contexts where food restriction and control are socially celebrated.

The findings of this review corroborate the need to overcome reductionist approaches in understanding eating disorders and dysfunctional eating behaviors, recognizing their social, cultural, and historical determinants. In this sense, the study by Leal (2023), in research conducted with Primary Health Care professionals in the state of Ceará, identified that many of these professionals still associate eating disorders with clinical manifestations such as extreme thinness and frequent episodes of binge eating.

Furthermore, participants reported the absence of specific clinical protocols for managing these conditions in primary care, gaps in basic academic training, and insufficient continuing education initiatives focused on the comprehensive approach to eating disorders in the context of public health. These structural and training limitations compromise the primary health care system's ability to address this growing phenomenon, reinforcing the urgent need for investments in health education, curriculum review in health courses, and the development of institutional guidelines that address the complexity of the new expressions of eating disorders today.

Given this scenario, the results of this review reinforce the importance of nutritionists in public health services in promoting healthy eating and preventing dysfunctional eating behaviors, understood within their social and cultural determinants. The literature analyzed shows that nutritional practices guided exclusively by markers of body weight, aesthetics, and rigid food control tend to reproduce individualistic and moralizing logics of eating, contributing to the aggravation of food guilt, psychological suffering, and the establishment of dysfunctional relationships with eating, thus contradicting the principles of comprehensiveness and health promotion that underpin the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS).

It is therefore necessary to rethink nutritional practices in a collective context from a critical and emancipatory perspective, grounded in the recognition of body diversity, the strengthening of individual autonomy, and the valuing of the human right to adequate food. This change presupposes a break with normative models of body and food widely disseminated by fitness culture and digital media, favoring a more ethical, comprehensive professional practice committed to health equity.

In addition to the studies included in this systematic review, other academic productions reinforce the identified findings. This is the case of Ferrari's master's thesis (2021), linked to the Postgraduate Program in Physical Education at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). The study was conducted with adult women who frequently use social networks, and it qualitatively analyzed the influence of digital media on body perception, eating practices, and female identity. Although the dissertation was excluded from this review due to methodological criteria, specifically the temporal scope, its results show strong thematic convergence with the present research, as the author demonstrated that social networks exert a significant influence on the participants' relationship with their bodies and food.

The continuous consumption of *fitness*-related content fosters the internalization of aesthetic standards of thinness and muscle definition, in addition to stimulating feelings of guilt, body dissatisfaction, and the adoption of restrictive eating practices in pursuit of social

acceptance. These findings corroborate the reviewed literature by highlighting the role of digital media in normalizing dysfunctional eating behaviors and intensifying contemporary aesthetic pressure, further reinforcing the challenges faced by nutritionists in public health. Therefore, the need for food and nutrition education strategies that combat digital misinformation and promote a critical view of idealized body standards is emphasized.

In line with these findings, a cross-sectional observational study published in the Brazilian Journal of Sports Nutrition (RBNE) (Silva; Koritar , 2021) analyzed the dietary practices of people who engage in physical activity, showing that the pursuit of athletic performance and conformity to socially valued aesthetic standards encourages the adoption of restrictive and nutritionally inadequate behaviors, often without any scientific basis.

The authors pointed out that participants associated the concept of "clean" eating and the indiscriminate use of nutritional strategies with aesthetic success, reproducing discourses typical of *fitness culture* . Although this study was not included in the present review due to the adopted time frame, its findings are relevant to the results discussed here by indicating that behaviors initially perceived as healthy can culminate in dysfunctional eating behaviors. Furthermore, these data reinforce the challenges faced by nutritionists in public health given the trivialization of inadequate eating practices, legitimized under the discourse of a "healthy lifestyle," which compromises nutritional education efforts, the prevention of health problems, and the construction of a more balanced relationship with food.

Given this multifactorial perspective, Morgan C., Vecchiatti I. R., and Negrão AB, authors of a theoretical-analytical study published in the Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry, which, although not included in the final sample of this review due to the time frame, presents findings that strengthen the present discussion by relating the internalization of the ideal of thinness and sociocultural pressure to the emergence of dysfunctional eating practices. This convergence of results reinforces the impact of media and *fitness culture* identified in the articles analyzed in this research. Furthermore, the study underlines that the social normalization of restrictive practices represents a complex challenge for public health. In this scenario, the nutritionist stands out as a strategic actor, being required to act beyond individual clinical management, incorporating educational, preventive, and interdisciplinary actions in the face of contemporary aesthetic pressures.

Despite the relevance of the findings presented, the studies included in this review have important methodological limitations. The predominance of cross-sectional designs makes it impossible to establish causal relationships between exposure to fitness culture and the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors, restricting interpretations to the associative

field. Furthermore, many studies used self-reported instruments, which are subject to memory bias and social desirability biases, especially in contexts where certain restrictive behaviors are socially valued.

It is precisely this social valuation that sustains the methodological challenge pointed out by Leite et al. (2022), Cosh, MS; Olson, J.; Tully, JP (2023), Toguc and Hokelek (2025), and Fontes et al. (2025): the difficulty of drawing a clear line between healthy habits and obsessive-restrictive behaviors. The ambiguity of fitness culture discourses ends up normalizing the pathological, creating significant obstacles to the development of sensitive and population-specific screening tools. Even so, these conceptual and methodological gaps do not erase the convergence of results; on the contrary, they confirm that fitness culture, articulated with aesthetic pressure and the constant presence of social networks, exerts a profound and structuring impact on eating habits today.

For this reason, the findings reinforce the need to strengthen the role of nutritionists in public health, especially in actions promoting health, food and nutrition education, prevention of eating disorders, and the development of critical strategies to address food discourses disseminated through digital media.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this literature review show that fitness culture directly impacts the development and maintenance of dysfunctional eating behaviors, a scenario that challenges public health and primary care. The analyzed data indicate that the aesthetic pursuit of a thin or muscular body, amplified by social media and the discourse of a "healthy lifestyle," normalizes food restrictions, compulsions, and obsessions. Since these practices are socially accepted, their early identification in health services becomes even more complicated.

The problem is not limited to a niche; it affects everyone from university students and exercise enthusiasts to pregnant women and frequent users of digital media, demonstrating the complexity of the issue in public health. The line between what is seen as "focus" and what is pathological challenges primary care teams, who still face a lack of specific protocols, a scarcity of screening tools, and difficulties in their own training.

Regarding the role of the nutritionist, studies make it clear that it is necessary to go beyond weight control and calorie counting. Care must embrace the social, cultural, and subjective aspects of eating (feelings, beliefs and personal values, life history and affective memories, perception of health and beauty), making it urgent to strengthen a comprehensive

clinical practice that promotes autonomy, respects body diversity, and relies on critical strategies of Food and Nutrition Education to counter the discourses of the digital environment.

Current literature, however, still has significant shortcomings, as there is a predominance of cross-sectional studies and few intervention studies that analyze the problem in depth within Primary Care. Data on the real difficulties faced by nutritionists in dealing with eating disorders within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) are also lacking.

It is evident, therefore, that the consequences of fitness culture go far beyond the individual, and that the nutritionist has a strategic and political role in this scenario. It is up to this professional to lead a more ethical and humanized approach to care, focused on the patient's food autonomy, guaranteeing the right to adequate food, and combating the romanticization of harmful eating behaviors in communities.

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