# Paul Craig reveals eating disorder struggles amid intense UFC weight cuts



Paul Craig, the 37-year-old Scottish mixed martial arts fighter, has publicly spoken out about his struggles with an eating disorder that developed during his transition to the middleweight division in 2023. This revelation, accompanied by his personal account, underscores a complex issue that many athletes face when managing their weight for competition.

During his preparation for fights, Craig, who typically weighs around 220lb, cut down to the UFC's middleweight threshold of 185lb. Such drastic weight loss involved a rigorous 10-week calorie restriction that he described as "horrible." This extreme weight-cutting regimen led to significant physical and mental health issues, including low testosterone levels and recurrent infections. Reflecting on his experience, Craig stated, “I set myself a goal of being middleweight champion and focussed and did it. But mentally, I ended up with an eating disorder.” His candid invitation for fighters who share similar struggles to seek help is a powerful reminder of the importance of mental health in sports.

The National Health Service delineates eating disorders as mental health conditions wherein individuals manage emotional turmoil through food control. With athletes like Craig frequently under immense pressure to perform and adhere to strict weight classes, the risk of developing disordered eating habits is notably elevated. The unique demands placed on athletes foster an environment conducive to such conditions, driven by perfectionism, competitiveness, and the unremitting scrutiny of their physiques.

Craig's case exemplifies a broader issue within the sporting world known as Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S). This condition occurs when athletes do not consume adequate calories to fuel their training and maintain normal physiological functions. The repercussions of RED-S can be severe, ranging from hormonal imbalances to heightened anxiety, poor performance, and even life-threatening health complications. Athletes across various disciplines, particularly those in weight-sensitive sports or sports demanding aesthetic appeal, are particularly vulnerable to under-fuelling, as highlighted by the narratives of other athletes like New Zealand cycling champion Georgia Williams.

Coaches and trainers play a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with eating disorders. They are often the first to notice red flags, such as decreased concentration, erratic energy levels, and a drop in performance. The National Eating Disorders Association provides guidance for these figures, advising them to approach concerns with sensitivity and clarity. The nuanced understanding that eating disorders manifest differently among individuals is paramount to fostering a supportive atmosphere where athletes can thrive regardless of their body type.

Increasing awareness about eating disorders in athletics is essential, as many athletes, both male and female, struggle silently. While female athletes often face heightened scrutiny over body image, male athletes like Craig are beginning to break the silence around their challenges. The emphasis should lie not solely on appearance or weight but rather on skills, performance, and overall health. This paradigm shift is crucial for nurturing a supportive environment that prioritises athletes' well-being.

As Paul Craig advocates for open dialogue around these issues, his experience highlights the pressing need for greater awareness and support systems within the sports community. Breaking the stigma associated with eating disorders can usher in an era where athletes feel safe to discuss their struggles, seek help, and ultimately reshape the culture surrounding weight management and performance in competitive sports.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraph 8

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/mixed-martial-arts/articles/cpqelng3rl3o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/mixed-martial-arts/articles/cpqelng3rl3o> - Paul Craig, a 37-year-old Scottish UFC fighter, revealed he developed an eating disorder while cutting weight for his middleweight bouts in 2023. He restricted his calorie intake for 10 weeks leading up to the fights, resulting in physical health issues like low testosterone and frequent infections. Craig emphasized the importance of seeking help and support for those facing similar challenges. The NHS defines eating disorders as mental health conditions where individuals use food control to cope with emotions and situations.
3. <https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/ed-in-athletes/> - The National Alliance for Eating Disorders highlights that athletes face unique risk factors for eating disorders, including a singular focus on achievement over well-being, perfectionism, competitiveness, and constant scrutiny of their bodies. These factors can create an environment where eating disorders thrive in predisposed individuals. The article also discusses Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S), a condition affecting athletes who don't consume enough calories to support their training, leading to various health issues. ([allianceforeatingdisorders.com](https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/ed-in-athletes/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/reds-alert> - This article explores Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S), a condition where athletes fail to consume enough calories to support their training and vital body functions. It features stories from New Zealand cycling champion Georgia Williams and a former professional cyclocross racer, highlighting the dangers of under-fueling, including extreme fatigue, hormonal imbalances, bone loss, anxiety, and poor performance. Williams's RED-S diagnosis followed a minor crash resulting in serious fractures due to weakened bones from prolonged low energy availability. ([cyclingweekly.com](https://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/reds-alert?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/coaches-trainers/> - The National Eating Disorders Association provides guidance for coaches and athletic trainers on identifying and supporting athletes with eating disorders. Athletes may experience decreased concentration, inconsistent energy, and performance decrements. The article offers tips for coaches, including approaching athletes sensitively and privately, being direct and straightforward, and understanding that eating disorders don't have one 'look.' ([nationaleatingdisorders.org](https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/coaches-trainers/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/en/about/newsroom/articles/eating-disorders-in-female-athletes> - Mass General Brigham discusses the higher risk of eating disorders among female athletes, particularly in sports emphasizing individual performance or aesthetics, such as running, swimming, cycling, ballet, gymnastics, diving, and figure skating. The article emphasizes that becoming too thin can negatively impact performance and health over time. It encourages parents, coaches, and teammates to emphasize skill over weight and body shape, creating a safe space for athletes to have the bodies they have. ([massgeneralbrigham.org](https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/en/about/newsroom/articles/eating-disorders-in-female-athletes?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/lets-talk-about-eating-disorders-and-athletes/> - The National Alliance for Eating Disorders discusses risk factors impacting the prevalence of eating disorders in athletes, including the 'Thinness Performance Fallacy,' coach and authority figures' influence, abuse and neglect, and underlying self-esteem issues. The article emphasizes the importance of understanding these factors to address and prevent eating disorders in the athletic community. ([allianceforeatingdisorders.com](https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/lets-talk-about-eating-disorders-and-athletes/?utm_source=openai))