



Athlete Health and Wellbeing

Female Athlete Triad

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Welcome again coaches, parents and athletes.

The topic for this article has particular importance for our female athletes, however, the knowledge and ability to recognise the female athlete triad is important for people of all genders. I wish to prefix this article by echoing the position stand of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) who state that the benefits of exercise far outweigh the risks and all females should be encouraged to exercise [1].

In the early 1990's, research demonstrated a connection between physically active girls and women and dysfunctional menstruation, low bone mineral density and insufficient dietary intake [2]. This was coined the female athlete triad and can involve one, two or all of these conditions. It is more noticeable in aesthetic sports [2] (where body image/composition may be viewed as important i.e. gymnastics, swimming, diving etc) and in those who have a very high training load. Risk factors include a very physically demanding training load, dietary restriction and early sports specific dieting and training [1]. Potential negative outcomes from the triad can be short term or have long term effects on athletes and can include stress fractures, menstrual dysfunction and low energy availability.

I encourage everyone to read the referenced articles below and to be aware of the risks; however, I believe that as long as everyone looks after their body, there is only a very small chance of negative outcomes due to exercise so please don't let this scare you away from exercise.

[1] Nattiv, A., Loucks, A., Manore, M., Sanborn, C., Sundgot-Borgen, J., & Warren, M. (2007). The Female Athlete Triad. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 39(10), 1867–1882. doi: 10.1249/mss.0b013e318149f111

[2] Daily, J. P., & Stumbo, J. R. (2018). Female Athlete Triad. *Primary Care: Clinics in Office Practice*, 45(4), 615–624. doi: 10.1016/j.pop.2018.07.004