

Female Athlete Triad

What is the Female Athlete Triad:

A syndrome that deals with interrelationships between energy deficit, menstrual function, and bone mineral density

What is involved in the Triad:

1. Energy Deficit/Disordered Eating
 - Imbalance between the amount of energy consumed and the amount of energy expended during exercise
 - Abnormal eating behaviors include fasting, binge-eating and purging, excessive exercise after eating, diet pills, laxatives, and diuretics
2. Menstrual Dysfunction/Amenorrhea
 - Amenorrhea-absence of menstrual cycles longer than three months once regular menstruation has been established
 - Irregular menstrual cycles
 - Menstrual dysfunction can be caused by weight fluctuations, insufficient energy intake, and stress associated with intense training and exercise
3. Bone Mineral Density loss/Osteoporosis
 - Osteoporosis is defined as “ a skeletal disorder characterized by compromised bone strength predisposing a person to an increased risk of fractures”

Common Signs and Symptoms:

- Irregular or absent menstrual cycle
- Feeling tired and fatigued
- Sleeping problems
- Stress fractures and recurrent injuries
- Restrictive food intake
- Eating less than needed in an effort to improve performance or physical appearance
- Cold hands and feet
- Rapid change in weight
- Depression or mood swings

Possible Factors that can put you at risk:

- Playing sports that require weigh-in/weight classes
- Excessive exercise
- Pressure to “win at all costs”
- Controlling parents and coaches
- Dietary restrictions

High Risk Sports

- Sports that emphasis low body weight and lean physique
Gymnastics
Figure Skateing
Dancing
Distance Running
Swimming and diving
Light weight crew

Treatment Options:

1. It is important to recognize the signs of any of the components of the Triad. These should be screened for at the pre-participation physical examination.
2. Seek counseling from physician, nutritionist, or counselor

Prevention:

- Educate athletes, parents, and coaches about what Female Athlete Triad is, how to recognize it, and how to take steps to help prevent it

What Coaches Can do:

- Remind their athletes the importance of eating properly for success
- Focus on a healthy body image, not a specific body weight
- Support them on the field and off
- Do not perform weigh ins
- Do not comment on weight concerns in front of other athletes
- If recommendations are given for weight loss, make resources available for them to lose weight properly, for example: nutritionists, athletic trainers, counselors, and physicians

Responsibility of the Athlete:

- Monitor and keep track of your menstrual cycle
- Consult your physician if you have any irregularities in your menstrual cycle, recurrent injuries or stress fractures
- Seek counseling if you are becoming stressed about your weight
- Consult a sports nutritionist to help design a diet that is specific to you and your sport
- Seek out your friends, coaches, or parents if you need help or guidance.

What Parents Can Watch for:

- Athlete suddenly avoids meat products
- Athlete starts to limit portions at meals or begins measuring food servings
- Athlete uses the bathroom frequently after meals
- Athlete seems to withdraw from friends and functions surrounding meals.
- Athlete begins to wear baggy clothing or multiple layers even in warm climates.

Helpful Websites:

- **The Female Athlete Triad:** www.aafp.org/afp/2000601/3357.html
- **Position Statement: Female Athlete Triad:** www.acsm-msse.org
- **Female Athlete Triad Coalition:** www.femaleathletetriad.org