

Compulsive Exercise

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Compulsive exercise is not a recognized clinical diagnosis in the DSM-5, but many people struggle with symptoms associated with this term. If you are concerned about your or a loved one's relationship with exercise, please speak with a treatment professional.

What is Compulsive Exercise?

- Exercise that significantly interferes with important activities, occurs at inappropriate times or in inappropriate settings, or when the individual continues to exercise despite injury or other medical complications.
- Intense anxiety, depression and/or distress if unable to exercise.
- Discomfort with rest or inactivity.
- Exercise used to manage emotions.
- Exercise as a means of purging.
- Exercise as permission to eat.
- Exercise that is secretive or hidden.
- Feeling as though you are not good enough, fast enough or not pushing hard enough during a period of exercise.

Warning Signs

- Overtraining.
- Exercise takes place at inappropriate times and places.
- Exercise takes place despite injury or fatigue.
- Depression, anxiety and/or irritability.
- Feeling guilty if not exercising or if a workout is missed.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.

Health Consequences

- Bone density loss.
- Loss of menstrual cycle (in women).
- Female Athlete Triad (in women).
- Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S).

- Persistent muscle soreness.
- Chronic bone & joint pain.
- Increased incidence of injury (overuse injuries, stress fractures, etc.)
- Persistent fatigue and sluggishness.
- Altered resting heart rate.
- Increased frequency of illness & upper respiratory infections.

Did You Know?

- An estimated 90-95% of college students diagnosed with an eating disorder also belong to a fitness facility.
- An estimated 3% of gym-goers have a destructive relationship with exercise. Some studies have found that number may be even higher, including a 2008 Paris study that found that up to 42% of gym-goers have a destructive relationship with exercise.
- A study involving fitness professionals revealed that 100% of the participants believed that they would benefit from further education and guidelines for identifying and addressing eating disorders.
- There is a strong link between exercise compulsion and various forms of eating disorders.

References

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