



Why does mental health matter to student-athletes?

What it takes to be a successful athlete

When people think about what it takes to be a successful athlete, they typically think about characteristics like being strong, fast or nimble. They might not think about the athlete's mental health, but mental health is just as important as physical health in the formula for success in athletics. Having the right mindset and attitude can help to improve performance. If we aren't mentally healthy, it takes a toll on all aspects of functioning from academics to personal relationship to performance in sports.

Mental health and athletics go hand-and-hand.

How mental health affects athletics

- Athletes who can visualize themselves being successful are more likely to achieve success.
- Positive self-talk contributes to greater confidence, lower anxiety and improved performance.
- Athletes with greater self-awareness are better able to cope with stress in general and better able to bounce back when facing defeat or setbacks.
- Having good mental health helps athletes to adjust and adapt when they face obstacles.
- Increased ability to self-regulate when feeling anxiety or dealing with high demands.



How athletics affect mental health

- Exercise helps to keep the mind and the body healthy.
- Involvement in athletics can help to build resilience that helps people to cope effectively during difficult times.
- Participation in team sports offers opportunities to make social connections with teammates.
- Opportunities to experience mastery (proficiency, knowledge and understanding) builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Being outside in the sunlight and fresh air has been linked to improved moods and clearer thinking.



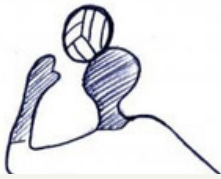
Why does mental health matter to student-athletes?

The down side of athletics

Athletics is more than fun and games. There are some aspects of involvement in sports that can have a negative impact on mental health.

- It can be difficult or uncomfortable to be in the spotlight.
- Pressure to perform well.
- They might make mistakes, fail or let people down.
- Potential for burnout if involved in multiple activities.
- Difficulty with time management.

'A blessing and a curse'



Self-reflection

Take a quiet moment and consider these questions. Remember, there are no incorrect answers :

- How would you describe your life as a student-athlete? (Joyous? Stressful? Promotes connection? Pressure inducing? Happy?)
- What do you gain in life through being a student-athlete?
- What are the physical and mental costs of being student-athlete?
- What are you doing to promote your physical health?
- What you doing to promote your mental health?



Tips to take care of yourself

In the same way that you do things to take care of your physical health, it is important to practice strategies for taking care of your mental health. Practicing these strategies on a regular basis will help you to stay emotionally and cognitively healthy.

- Positive statements (I am ____. I have ____ I can ____).
- Mindfulness or meditation to promote being fully present in the moment (not regretting the past or worried about the future).
- Keeping a gratitude journal – every day write down three things that you are glad are in your life or positive experiences that you had that day.
- Make time for doing something that energizes your soul – dancing, listening to music, spend time in nature or with loved ones.
- Give yourself permission to feel your emotions and find constructive ways to express them.