

Signs to Watch for

It's not just the amount of time you work out. The quality of your experience may mean the difference between healthy and unhealthy physical activity.

A person who overexercises may notice some of these things:

- You exercise no matter how you feel or what else you have to do.
- You exercise even when you're sick or injured.
- You take time away from work, social activities and relationships to exercise.
- You feel anxious or upset when you can't exercise.
- You count how many calories you burn, and exercise mainly to make up for eating or overeating.
- You rarely feel satisfied with how many miles you run, weights you lift or laps you swim.
- You ignore friends or family who are concerned about how much you exercise.

If you do 2 or more of these things, you might want to look at your motivations for exercising.

Who Can Help?

If you think you may have a problem with overexercise, or are worried about someone else, there are resources that can help.

Your health care provider can treat any medical consequences of overexercise, such as amenorrhea or injuries.

Individual counseling can help you cope with emotional issues and support you in creating healthy attitudes and behaviors around exercise.

Group therapy can provide support and understanding from others with similar problems.

Websites may be helpful in addressing issues related to overexercise, body image and eating disorders in women and men. These include:

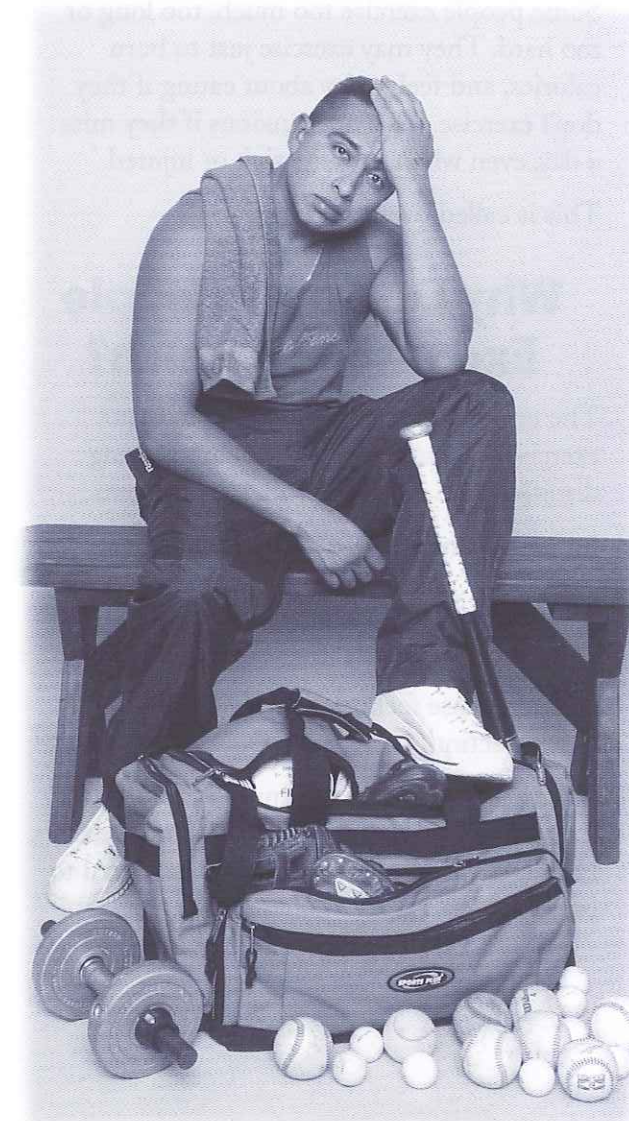
- National Eating Disorders Association: www.NationalEatingDisorders.org
- Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders: www.anred.com
- Body Positive: www.bodypositive.com
- Gurze Eating Disorders Resource Catalog: www.gurze.com

The Goal

Exercise should enhance physical and mental well-being. It shouldn't be a punishment or obligation.

The goal is to appreciate and enjoy moving and being in your body.

Too Much Exercise?



This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.

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Too Much of a Good Thing?

**Physical activity is healthy, fun, social and relieves stress...
...or does it?**

Some people exercise too much, too long or too hard. They may exercise just to burn calories, and feel guilty about eating if they don't exercise. They feel anxious if they miss a day, even when they are sick or injured.

This is called overexercising.

Why Do Some People Exercise Too Much?

The underlying factors that lead to over-exercise are similar to those behind eating disorders and other body image problems.

Both men and women may overexercise:

- To cope with or avoid feelings.
- To feel in control.
- To increase feelings of self-worth or body satisfaction.

When society glorifies thinness and being "in shape," it can make it hard to have healthy, balanced attitudes and behaviors in regard to exercise.

What's the Harm in Too Much Exercise?

Overexercise puts excess strain on the body.

It can cause a variety of injuries and physical problems:

- stress fractures
- swollen or aching joints
- impaired immune system function
- menstrual irregularities or amenorrhea (lack of periods) for women
- osteoporosis (weakening of bones)

Overexercise also has a negative emotional and psychological impact.

People who overexercise may have many characteristics of addiction, such as being obsessive, anxious, isolated or depressed.

They may have difficulties with relationships, work or school because of the time and priority they give to exercising.

The benefits of exercise are measured

not only in weight or muscle tone, but in other critical aspects of health such as cardiovascular fitness, normal blood pressure, improved mood and decreased stress.

What's Healthy Physical Activity?

**Some exercise is desirable, healthy and necessary.
Too much can be unhealthy and even dangerous.**

Healthy exercise	Overexercise
• Helps relieve stress.	• Creates stress.
• Is worth the time.	• Keeps you from other important activities.
• May be social and interactive.	• Can be isolating and secretive.
• Increases strength and energy.	• Wears you down.
• Can improve mood and help you feel great.	• May prevent you from dealing with your feelings.

An Exercise Quiz

Are you exercising for true mental and physical health?

Answer these questions:

- Do I exercise for overall health and not just to lose weight?
- Would I still work out if it didn't change my muscle tone or appearance?
- Do I consider lots of physical activities exercise (doing chores, walking, biking, taking the stairs)?
- Do I follow my body's cues about when and how much to exercise? Do I take injury, illness or mood into account?
- Can I take time off from exercise without feeling lazy or guilty?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, chances are you're exercising for the right reasons.