

Recognizing, Preventing, and Managing Athletes with Depression

Depression is a mood disorder commonly characterized as unusual sadness with changes in personality, appetite, and sleep patterns. Depressed athletes have a greater chance of becoming injured and can suffer from decreased performance levels.

What are the warning signs?

The following list, while not all inclusive, are some of the things to watch out for or pay attention to when around athletes:

Changes in mood, weight, and sleep patterns

Trouble Concentrating

Loss of interest

Withdrawing from others

Decreased Energy

Irritable or angry

Feelings of Worthlessness

Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

Recklessness

Are there any ways to prevent Depression?

SCREEN for factors that make a person more likely to develop depression

EDUCATE to help athletes understand the importance of recognizing and treating depression

INVOLVE injured athletes in team activities so they do not feel forgotten

BUILD a trusting relationship with your athletes so they feel comfortable talking to you about their feelings

POSITIVE attitudes are shown to those seeking help, especially from coaches

Ways to Manage the Athlete

TALK

Try talking with them but remember they might not open up right away

REFER

Refer to a mental health professional when needed

LISTEN

Always be compassionate and supportive

HIPAA

Different states have different rules on who you can and cannot tell, especially with minors

An immediate emergency referral is needed if an athlete is a danger to him/herself or others

Sources:

1. Granquist M, Hamson-Utley J, Kenow LJ, Stiller-Ostrowski. Psychosocial Strategies for Athletic Training. Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis Company; 2015.
2. Putukian M. The psychological response to injury in student athletes: a narrative review with a focus on mental health. Br J Sports Med. 2016;50:145-148.
3. Pearce M. 'Being there': Sports Trainers and depression in athletes. Sports Health. 2014;32(3): 64-65.
4. The American College of Sports Medicine. Psychological Issues Related to Illness and Injury in Athletes and the Team Physician: A Consensus Statement – 2016 Update. Med Sci Sports Exerc. 2017;49(5):1042-1054.
5. American Psychological Association. Protecting your privacy: Understanding confidentiality. American Psychological Association Website. Accessed August 24, 2017.