

Over-exercising

“ My daughter has always been more sporty and active than her friends. She goes to the gym every day for two hours – should I be worried? ”

Exercise is recognised as being important for physical and psychological well being. It is recommended that everyone takes part in exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week.

Many people exercise much more frequently than that and their activity levels are not harmful. They may be working towards sport or aerobic goals and gain a high degree of satisfaction from their exercise.

How can you tell when someone is over-exercising?

A person who is over-exercising in a harmful way may show some or all of the following signs:

- They exercise regardless of all consequences – missing social activities or important school, college or work commitments.
- They have an emotional attachment to exercise and become extremely anxious if they miss an exercise session.
- The goal of exercise is to lose weight and feel worthwhile, rather than for athletic goals, enjoyment or social interaction.
- Their schedule is rigid and if they miss one exercise session, they will do twice the amount next time.
- They will exercise even if they are injured.
- They will exercise alone.

What are the consequences of over-exercising?

People who regularly over-exercise are at risk of the following physical side-effects and complications:

- Degenerative arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Stress fractures
- Fatigue
- Breakdown of muscle mass
- Dehydration
- Cardiovascular complications

There are also a number of social side-effects of over-exercising as the problem becomes a dominant influence in the sufferer's life:

- Deterioration of social relationships
- Failure or difficulties at school, college and work due to the demands of exercise regime
- Social isolation
- Anxiety and depression
- Poor self-esteem and self-image