

# FEMALE ATHLETES AND MENTAL HEALTH

the center for the female athlete

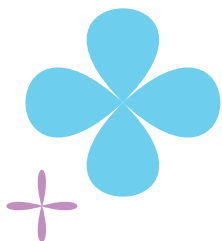


Female athletes encounter unique circumstances and challenges that can have an impact on their mental health. Competitive athletes face pressures from their own expectations to perform flawlessly, but also externally to maintain athletic and social standards. According to a 2016 study from Drexel University, 30% of female student athletes have a mental health issue compared to 18% of male athletes. That number continues to rise as we deal with the long-term effects of the pandemic. Compounded with the time and energy required to perform at a high-level for extended periods of time—the pressure and expectations can become emotionally exhausting. While pre-game jitters are normal, when your athlete starts to exhibit signs of ongoing mental health concerns it's important to get them the support they need to be the best versions of themselves.

## warning signs\*

- Feelings of sadness, which can include crying spells for no reason
- Frustration, irritability, annoyance or feelings of anger, even over small matters
- Feeling hopeless or empty
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Loss of interest in, or conflict with, family and friends
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Tiredness and loss of motivation
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Agitation or restlessness — for example, pacing, handwringing or an inability to sit still
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Social isolation or not wanting to be around anyone
- Changes in academic and/or athletic engagement
- Angry outbursts, disruptive or risky behavior, or other acting-out behaviors
- Self-harm — for example, cutting or burning
- Making a suicide plan or a suicide attempt
- Feelings of worry that lead to recurrent avoidance of certain people, activities, or situations
- Easily fatigued
- Restlessness or feeling on edge
- Easily irritable
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep or acquiring restful sleep

*\*exhibiting any one of these signs does not mean that the individual has a mental health concern and they should be considered in the context of his/her usual level of functioning and demeanor*



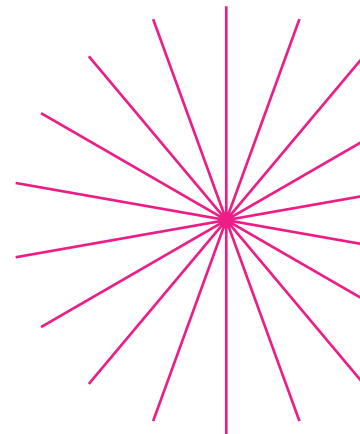


### how to support your athlete

While competitive athletes may feel much of their schedule is taken up by their sport, it is crucial they carve out intentional time for routine self-care. This can be as simple as scheduling 5-10 minutes every day to reflect using a journal or engage in a mindfulness exercise. Research has shown that mindfulness can improve an athlete's immediate outlook on their day, but also bring about awareness of how they are feeling emotionally and physically.

Athletes are just as human as everyone else and require regular maintenance and recovery to reach their long-term goals. Athletes that are emotionally invested in themselves will see strength in making challenging decisions for their health, even if it is unpopular. It is important for athletes to be aware of what their body and mind needs to sustain themselves and sometimes that may mean pausing to seek support or even professional help.

The Center for the Female Athlete incorporates behavioral health support as part of its holistic approach to care. Combined with sports medicine and nutrition, the center treats the whole athlete, rather than an injury. At the Center for the Female Athlete, our female athletes have a unique opportunity to learn how to invest in their physical and emotional health. We know that the mind and body work together so it's important to address their overall wellness as an athlete.



### additional resources for your athlete

- **Pediatrician:** Your child's pediatrician is a great place to start if you're looking for mental health support and resources. They can refer you to additional resources in the community, if needed.
- **Behavioral health crisis center:** The behavioral health crisis center at Dayton Children's main campus was designed to evaluate children experiencing a mental health crisis in a safe, caring and effective way. A mental health crisis is when there are concerns of suicidal ideation and safety in which the youth may harm self or others and there is a need for stabilization. In the crisis center, trained behavioral health clinicians will provide an assessment and connect children to the appropriate services, getting them help quicker.
- **Mental Health Resource Connection:** The Mental Health Resource Connection is a service that connects patients and families to available mental health services in the community. The service is administered by social workers experienced in evaluating pediatric mental health needs and the services required to meet those needs.

