



# overtraining syndrome

The Center for the Female Athlete

It is normal to feel physically fatigued during the challenges of intense training. But it is not healthy for this fatigue from intense training to go on for long periods of time. The brain knows why the intensity increased but the body does not. The body still has a stress response to the physical demands of intense exercise. When this stress response becomes chronic and lasts for weeks or months at a time, the athlete can develop overtraining syndrome. Overtraining syndrome can negatively affect psychological, neurological, endocrine and immunologic systems.

Short periods of intense training (up to two weeks) can cause short-term fatigue and poor performance. This is expected and not concerning. It eventually leads to improved performance as training demands decrease again. Experienced coaches time these bouts of intense exercise, with less demand training, to optimize performance for big events.

When the body's stress response to intense training goes on for too long, the body and mind start to break down. Beyond two weeks of intense training you may experience signs of overtraining syndrome that may include:

- Fatigue
- Decreased performance
- Trouble coping with mental stress
- Sleep problems
- Increased illness
- Mental foggiess
- Difficulty concentrating

These symptoms may last weeks, months, an entire season or longer. Overtraining affects psychological, neurological, endocrine and immune systems as it reacts to chronic physical stress.

## diagnosis and treatment for overtraining

There is not a specific test to diagnose overtraining syndrome. The diagnosis is considered through training history, symptoms, and ruling out other causes.

To manage overtraining syndrome, some athletes may:

- Feel better if they change to a less competitive environment, where there is less mental and physical pressure to perform.
- Need extended time off (six weeks or longer). Some athletes may need up to a year off.

Treatment involves decreasing the mental pressure to perform and decreasing the physical stress from frequent, intense training. It is often okay to continue exercise, but a medical team will make recommendations about intensity and frequency.

