

Health

Year Round Athletes Vulnerable to Stress



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These days, athletes train year round--commonly in more than one sport. There are the in-season practices and games to be balanced with off-season training. Summer entails camps and practices that push athletes to improve. An athlete participating in three sports rarely has a break. This can lead to various issues.

The increased demand on high school athletes has led to many changes from "the way things used to be" (in the past, an athlete played one fall sport and could focus on a winter and spring sport in their respective seasons). This has led to

season, this can be physically stressful enough for even an injury-free athlete. But for an athlete that has suffered an injury, the lack of a rest period can seriously impair the athlete's ability to perform at their optimal level in their next sport. Even a small injury that the athlete was able to play through, such as a mild ankle sprain or strained hamstring, can continue to plague the athlete through the next season (or two) if not taken care of and given the appropriate recovery time. Bottom line: Rest is imperative!

Physical demands on the bodies of three-season athletes

The biggest psychological demand on young athletes is stress.

many students juggling daily practices for their current sport and a couple of practices a week for their off-season sport. That doesn't even address a full academic schedule, clubs, meetings and family commitments! Too much pressure, you say? Well, the increased demand on athletes certainly has its negative effects, both psychological and physical. Let's examine a few.

The biggest psychological demand on young athletes is stress. As athletes are constantly balancing 2-3 sports, they become burdened as to which sports they must devote the most time and effort. This may not only affect their athletic performance, but also their academic performance. When crunched for time, sleep is usually one of the first things sacrificed, affecting both mental and physical recovery.

A good night's sleep is necessary for the body to recover from the stresses placed upon it that day. During stages of the sleep cycle, the body enters different phases of recovery. One stage of the sleep cycle allows for mental recovery and the brain's storage of information in short term memory. This is converted to long term memory and organized for later retrieval. Another stage of the sleep cycle allows for physical rest, repair and renewal. This is especially important for athletes recovering from hard workouts. Doctor's advice: "Get 8 hours of sleep and call me in the morning!" Sleep helps keep the immune system ward off illness and allows the body to yield good stats on the field!

Athletes get less recovery time at night from lack of sleep, and they also have no time between seasons for physical recovery between sports. Most seasons are overlapping with post-season tournaments running into the try-outs and practices for the next season. After a full competitive athletic

are significant no matter what sports are played, but some combinations can end up being more stressful to the body than others. This results in a high risk of developing overuse injuries. Consider this triple threat—the male athlete that plays football, basketball and baseball. All of these sports put a tremendous amount of strain on the shoulder joint. This combination can be especially deleterious, depending on the positions played.

Caution should be given to any athlete who competitively trains in one sport year-round or multiple sports throughout the year—especially if those sports put stress on the same joint. Training cycles should be developed to give the body time to recover. Proper training and rest equal optimal performance at the height of competition. Better to rest and train preventively than be stuck resting with an injury on the bench!

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Many cross country runners participate in track and field and other sports throughout the year. It's important for athletes to build periods of rest into their training routines to lessen stress on their bodies (Photo by www.michaelmcloone.com).