



**What are the
signs of
overtraining
in sport? ▶**

Overtraining is a complex phenomenon, and the specific causes are not yet fully understood. Preventing this condition is difficult because the symptoms are highly individual and there are no clear warning signs. However, there is general consensus that once overtraining has been diagnosed, prolonged rest is the only cure.

Symptoms of overtraining may include lethargy, a loss of appetite, an increase in the incidence of infections, disturbed sleep patterns, and depression. The athlete will not perform at his or her usual level, may no longer want to compete, and may drop out of sport altogether.

Youth overtraining may also be the cause if a child

- is easily fatigued and irritated
- has physical complaints or eating problems
- loses self-esteem
- shows increased moodiness and/or self-criticism.¹

Generally speaking, youngsters who suffer from overtraining experience persistent fatigue and their performance decreases. Being tired after exercise is normal, but when an athlete is constantly tired and lacks energy, overtraining may be the cause. Experts agree that rest and recovery after exercise is a critical component of every training program.

Overtraining is not common in youth sport, but it may surface in sports where younger children are engaged in formal regular training. Dr. Roy Shephard, professor emeritus of applied physiology at the University of Toronto's School of Physical and Health Education, says that on average, children will not push themselves to the point of over-exertion; however, it is possible for an over-enthusiastic coach to do this.

A child does not have to be an elite athlete to suffer from overtraining. Training that is either too frequent, too intense, too long, or does not include adequate rest can make athletes of all ages and abilities suffer from physical and mental fatigue.

When winning and high-level performance are over-emphasized, the danger of the child suffering negative effects increases greatly. The negative effects can come from the demands being too high in a single training session, but are more often the result of the child training too hard and too often over a long period of time. For instance, too much emphasis on breaking age group records can be a cause of overtraining in young athletes.