Medical Xpress

College athletes often sidelined from healthy lifestyle later in life

March 3 2014

An Indiana University study found that elite college athletes—typically the picture of health and vitality—often struggle to stay active in later years, facing limitations to their day-to-day activities in middle age that could be a result of injuries during their athletic career.

Lead investigator Janet Simon, a doctoral candidate in the IU School of Public Health-Bloomington's Department of Kinesiology, said researchers have long known that compared to non-athletes, college athletes experience more severe injuries—and long-term effects of those injuries. She was surprised, however, with her findings that the former elite athletes also scored worse on depression, fatigue and sleep scales.

Her study—which focused on Division I athletes, considered the most competitive college athletes—was published in the *American Journal of Sports Medicine*.

"Division I athletes may sacrifice their future health-related quality of life for their brief athletic career in college," Simon said. "Also, when comparing former Division I athletes, non-athletes who were physically active in college and the general U.S. population, it appears that, in rank order of the three groups, non-athletes who were recreationally active in college had better health-related quality of life scores, followed by the general U.S. population. This may be because former Division I athletes sustain more injuries and possibly more severe injuries due to the rigor of their sport."

Here are more findings from the study, which analyzed questionnaires completed by 232 male and female former Division I athletes and 225 male and female non-collegiate athletes. The study participants were between 40 and 65 years old, and their scores were compared to a representative sample of the U.S. population in the same age range:

- Former Division I athletes were more than twice as likely as non-athletes to report physical activity limitations to daily activities and exercise.
- 67 percent of the athletes reported sustaining a major injury and 50 percent reported chronic injuries, compared to 28 percent and 26 percent respectively for non-athletes.
- 70 percent of athletes reported practicing or performing with an injury, compared to 33 percent on non-athletes.
- 40 percent of athletes reported being diagnosed with osteoarthritis after college compared to 24 percent of the non-athletes. Osteoarthritis has been linked to previous joint injuries.

Simon said athletes have access to a range of expertise during their college years, including strength and conditioning coaches and nutritionists, but they often find themselves on their own after graduating.

"Many of the Division I sports are not lifelong sports, so it is important for the athletes to find sports and activities that can keep them active as they age," Simon said. "The most important thing is to stay active. You may have been a former athlete, but unless you stay active your whole life, you may be decreasing your quality of life."

Provided by Indiana University

Citation: College athletes often sidelined from healthy lifestyle later in life (2014, March 3)

retrieved 19 September 2024 from
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-college-athletes-sidelined-healthy-lifestyle.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.