

College athletes putting themselves at risk for long-term health problems

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College athletes are putting themselves at risk for health problems that could persist long after they graduate, warns Loyola University Medical Center sports medicine physician Dr. Pietro Tonino.

"Parents who push their children to specialize in one sport and train extensively in order to win athletic scholarships should be aware there could be long-term health consequences," Tonino said.

Tonino cites a recent study published in the *American Journal of Sports Medicine*. Researchers at Indiana University surveyed two groups of middle-aged college graduates. A group of former Division I athletes was compared with nonathletes who participated in recreational activities, club sports or intramurals during college. (Tonino was not involved in the study.)

The former athletes reported worse physical function, depression, fatigue, sleep disturbances and pain interference than nonathletes. The athletes also reported more limitations in daily activities and more major and chronic injuries.

Tonino noted that a group of Northwestern University football players recently launched an effort to unionize [college athletes](#). Among the goals of the College Athletes Players Association is to obtain guaranteed coverage for sports-related medical expenses for current and former players. The association also wants to minimize the risk of sports-related traumatic brain injury.

Tonino said improvements in equipment and playing surfaces have reduced the risk of injuries to college athletes. Recent rule changes also are designed to make sports safer.

"We should continue to explore new ways to make college [sports](#) as safe and as injury-free as possible," Tonino said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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