

Physicians: Treat eSport players as college athletes

January 22 2019

With more than 80 US colleges offering varsity eSport teams, physicians writing in the *British Journal of Medicine* say collegiate players should be treated as athletes, with an appropriate level of medical care to promote continuing health.

Osteopathic sports medicine physicians at New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine surveyed 65 collegiate varsity eSport players from nine American universities, finding that the players' training schedules averaged five to 10 hours per day, with many players reporting physical injuries.

The most common reported complaint was eye fatigue (56 percent), followed by neck and back pain (42 percent), wrist pain (36 percent), and hand pain (32 percent). Only two percent of those who suffered an ailment sought medical attention.

"When we think of an eSport player, we don't typically think he or she needs a physician's clearance to participate in a sedentary activity with little chance of injury," says Hallie Zwibel, DO, director of sports medicine at New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine, who also oversees NYIT's Center for eSports Medicine, and is a co-author on this study. "Quite contrary to that belief, these athletes suffer health concerns and chronic overuse injuries—some of which are career ending. It's time we begin to proactively manage these issues."

Causes of injury

eSport requires players to focus on LED computer monitors for long periods of time. Recent research has demonstrated that excessive exposure to LED light can damage retinas and disrupt melatonin levels and natural circadian rhythm. As a result, players often experience eye strain and impaired sleep patterns.

Given the necessity of being seated for hours on end, posture is also negatively affected in eSport gamers, resulting in neck and back pain. In addition, the survey found 40 percent of players get no physical activity, furthering susceptibility to injury due to weakened musculature.

The high number of hours dedicated to practice could easily cause overuse injuries, and that risk is compounded by the intensity of game play. The average novice players make approximately 50 action moves per minute. However, higher level players make 500-600 action moves per minute—or about 10 moves per second.

In addition to overuse injuries, there are mental health issues related to eSports, including addictive behavior, personal hygiene issues, social anxiety, and sleep disturbances.

Catching up

Colleges, universities, and high schools are adding eSport teams at a rapid pace. In the US, There are more than 50 colleges with varsity eSport teams under the National Association of Collegiate eSports, and 22 colleges in the US currently offer scholarships for gaming. The NCAA is currently investigating whether to recognize eSport.

Researchers say schools need to also provide the same level of

preventive training and care and [injury](#) treatment expected for traditional athletes. Dr. Zwibel says [college](#) eSport teams require the support of multidisciplinary medical staff who can identify and address social or addictive behaviors, like changes in academic or work performance, and chronic eSport gaming injuries, such as wrist or hand problems, eye strain and postural assessments.

"The common concerns and injuries that are seen in eSport athletes are not the typical injuries seen in traditional student athletes," says Dr. Zwibel. "Many physicians and athletic trainers may not identify these injuries because eSports are relatively new and the health consequences are emerging as these teams become more common."

More information: Joanne DiFrancisco-Donoghue et al, Managing the health of the eSport athlete: an integrated health management model, *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjsem-2018-000467](#)

Provided by New York Institute of Technology

Citation: Physicians: Treat eSport players as college athletes (2019, January 22) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-01-physicians-esport-players-college-athletes.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.