

Menstrual dysfunction is more common among young athletes than among non-athletes

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Young athletes experience more menstrual dysfunction than non-athletes do, according to a new Finnish study. Credit: University of Jyväskylä

Menstrual dysfunction is more prevalent in young Finnish athletes than it

is among non-athletes of a similar age, but athletes experience less body weight dissatisfaction than non-athletes do. These findings are from a recent study at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The study was conducted among members of sports clubs who exercised at least four times a week (athletes) and non-members (non-athletes).

The current study used data from the Finnish Health Promoting Sports Club (FHPSC) study, in which a cohort of athletes and non-athletes in adolescence (14-16 years) and subsequently in young adulthood (18-20 years) were investigated.

The findings of the study showed that in adolescence, 18% of both athletes and non-athletes reported menstrual dysfunction. However, 8% of the athletes reported primary amenorrhea (absence of menses by the age of 15) in contrast to the non-athletes group, where the prevalence of primary amenorrhea was 0%. In young adulthood, the prevalence of menstrual dysfunction in athletes was 39%, while 6% of the non-athletes reported menstrual dysfunction. In this study, menstrual dysfunction was defined as follows: primary amenorrhea, prolonged [menstrual cycle](#) (>35 days) or absence of menses for at least three consecutive months (secondary amenorrhea).

"We did not investigate the reasons for menstrual dysfunction, but we know from previous studies that one of the most common reasons for menstrual dysfunction is low energy availability (i.e., inadequate energy intake relative to exercise [energy expenditure](#))," explains Suvi Ravi, the corresponding author and a Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences.

"The [human body](#) is wise, and in this kind of situation it allocates energy to the functions essential for survival and reduces energy allocation for the systems that are not so essential for life, such as reproductive

function."

The present study also assessed body [weight](#) dissatisfaction among the participants. The results showed that athletes were more satisfied with their weight and had less desire to lose weight than non-athletes did. Despite this, in both age groups about 20% of the athletes and about 40% of the non-athletes reported body weight dissatisfaction.

"This is concerning since we know that body weight dissatisfaction can result in disordered eating," Ravi says.

"Attention should be paid to young people's [body](#) weight dissatisfaction as well as menstrual dysfunction in order to prevent future health problems, such as disordered eating and impaired bone mineral density, which can result from low energy availability and menstrual dysfunction."

More information: Suvi Ravi et al, Menstrual dysfunction and body weight dissatisfaction among Finnish young athletes and non-athletes, *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/sms.13838](#)

Provided by University of Jyväskylä

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