

Digital solutions may aid athletes' mental health

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From stress, burnout, career disruption and social isolation, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed similar challenges for many people including one special subgroup—that of elite athletes.

"Athletes are unique in their [mental health problems](#) but also their resilience," says Dr. Luke Balcombe from the Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention, whose review of the most up-to-date mental health literature has been published in JMIR Formative Research.

"Elite athletes are an at-risk population for mental health problems compared to the general population. And 2020 has posed significant challenges with worldwide disruptions to athletes' training and competition.

"We found that digital mental health platforms including the use of smartphones and online behavior analysis could help improve the mental health of athletes especially during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Dr. Balcombe and colleague, Emeritus Professor Diego De Leo, report that accumulative stress can manifest into more intense and [severe symptoms](#) compounded by ongoing stigma and non-recognition of issues.

"Hence, tailored screening and tracking of psychological protective and [risk factors](#) are needed to better understand the association with psychological symptoms, disorders and abnormal behavior," Dr. Balcombe said.

"While sporting bodies and athletes have largely embraced mental health awareness and made efforts to address the barriers to help-seeking, promotion of a holistic approach is needed including a prevention and early intervention framework. There should be more specific awareness of the range of mental ill-health through to positive functioning.

The researchers recognize collaboration between humans and machines will be critical to the innovation of mental health care in the future.

"Our vision is a hybrid model of care, combining traditional face-to-face approaches as well as innovative digital technologies that may be used in promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies."

More information: Luke Balcombe et al. Psychological Screening and Tracking of Athletes and Digital Mental Health Solutions in a Hybrid Model of Care: Mini Review, *JMIR Formative Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.2196/22755](https://doi.org/10.2196/22755)

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