



## Female Athlete Triad

Female Athlete Triad is a syndrome that involves an unbalanced relationship among a female athlete's energy levels, bone mineral density, and menstrual function that can lead to a series of health concerns. Imbalances in any of these 3 areas can lead to eating problems, osteopenia/osteoporosis, and/or menstrual dysfunction.

Female athletes are at an increased risk of developing the Triad due to the high demand that athletics place on the female body physically, as well as increasing societal pressures for performance and image. The Triad has been described as a syndrome that involves both the physical and mental aspects of health. It can be present in any female athlete, from the elite athlete striving to reach high-performance goals, to the adolescent female whose body is going through normal changes related to puberty.

Symptoms related to the 3 components of the Triad may develop over time, ranging from months to years, and may include:

- Low energy during school, work, or exercise
- Irregular or absent menstrual cycles
- Stress-related bone injuries (stress reactions or fractures)
- Difficulty concentrating
- An unexplained drop in performance
- Changes in eating habits
- Altered sleeping patterns
- An unusually high focus on performance or image
- Experiencing high levels of stress

## HOW A PHYSICAL THERAPIST CAN HELP

Physical therapists are trained to identify signs and symptoms of the Female Athlete Triad and initiate multidisciplinary care, as appropriate and needed. They are also trained to understand the implications that the Triad may have on exercise prescription. Once an athlete's symptoms are resolved, a physical therapist will design an individualized return to activity program that encourages a safe, progressive level of activity, in order to achieve an optimal performance level.