

IOC reinforces alert on energy deficiency syndrome

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Lausanne, September 29 (IOC) - A new consensus statement from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, highlights the risk to athletes of a syndrome that affects health and performance.

The cause lies in a mismatch between calories consumed and burned during exercise, known as relative energy deficiency in sport (REED).

The consensus, informed by a panel of international experts, builds on key advances in science over the past five years, with the aim of promoting broader recognition and prevention of the syndrome and optimizing the health, psychological well-being and performance of athletes.

In particular, the statement highlights new evidence on the emerging role of inadequate carbohydrate intake; the overlap between DERD and overtraining syndrome; the timeline of DERD development; the interaction between mental health and DERD; and advances in understanding the syndrome in male athletes and para-athletes.

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DERDs affect multiple body systems and functions, as well as athletes' performance. The IOC first recognized them as a distinct entity in a 2014 consensus statement, which was updated in 2018.

Dr. Richard Budgett, IOC chief medical and scientific officer, explained that the "IOC consensus statements play a central role in translating research and theory into clinical practice. This new statement will go a long way toward protecting the health of athletes through improvements in both the prevention and management of DERDs."

While the true prevalence of DERD varies among sports (with estimates ranging from 15 to 80 percent of elite athletes), the statement finds that the syndrome often goes unnoticed by athletes themselves, their coaches and team physicians, and may be unintentionally exacerbated by "sports culture" due to perceived short-term performance improvements from limiting calorie intake.

"DERD syndrome is common in both male and female athletes in many sports, and although we understand much more about its causes, awareness of the syndrome and its health and performance consequences is still low among athletes, their medical and performance support teams, and the general public," explained Professor Margo Mountjoy, a member of the IOC Medical and Scientific Commission's Games Group and lead author of the consensus statement.

"We are very hopeful that this statement will improve awareness and understanding of DERD and stimulate action by sports organizations and scientists, and athlete health and performance teams, to protect the health and well-being of the many athletes at risk for this syndrome."

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