

## **Compulsive Exercising**

### **What is compulsive exercising?**

Compulsive exercising, also called over-exercising or obligatory exercising is when an individual engages in strenuous physical activity with to the point that is unsafe and unhealthy.

### **How much exercise is considered too much?**

To maintain cardiovascular health, 2,000-3,500 calories should be burned each week through aerobic exercises, such as running, dancing, cycling and the like. Thirty to forty-five minutes a day, five or six days a week is sufficient to acquire these health benefits. Exercise beyond 3,500 calories per week, however, leads to decreased physical benefits and increased risk of injury.

### **What motivates sufferers to exercise too much?**

Those who compulsively exercise often work out to attain a temporary sense of power and self-control. Some over-exercisers are also anorexic or bulimic, and cope with their emotions and anxiety through excessive exercise in addition to their eating disorder. Participation in athletics or dance can also play a role, as coaches, parents, and other participants stress that being thin is necessary to succeed with the activity. Those involved in sports or dance may also receive a great deal of praise for being so “fit and trim” which can fuel the destructive behavior.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of compulsive exercising?**

Over-exercisers typically work out beyond the limits of safe. They will find ways to work out even if it means cutting school, taking time off from work, getting too little sleep, or missing social events. Sufferers typically feel severe guilt when they cannot exercise, and rarely consider their workouts fun or enjoyable.

### **What are some consequences of compulsive exercise?**

The risks with this disorder are both physical and emotional. All too often, a sufferer may see deterioration of their personal relationships or failure at work or school. Many who exercise compulsively become socially withdrawn.

The physical risks are numerous. A very real risk with this disorder is dehydration if the sufferer is not drinking enough fluids. Over-exercise can also lead to insomnia, depression, and fatigue. Additional physical side effects include muscular and skeletal injuries, like shin splits, bone fractures, arthritis, or damage to cartilage and ligaments. Too much exercise can lead to the release of excessive free radicals, which have been linked to cellular mutations and cancer. Females may no longer menstruate, a condition called amenorrhea.

*Adapted from the University of Pennsylvania website, March 2006*