Can you
Exercise
Too
Much?

You run in the morning, train for your next marathon at night despite a nagging injury and head to the gym to weight train in your free time. Missing a workout is not an option.

Are you exercise obsessed or just an avid exercise enthusiast? That depends on your attitude, say mental-health experts.

If you exercise frequently because you enjoy it and you like the health benefits it provides, you have the right reasons in mind. If you exercise because you feel compelled to do so, and in spite of having injuries, you may be at risk for developing an exercise disorder.

"There is no set formula or standard that reveals how much exercising is too much," says Theresa Fassihi, Ph.D., a psychologist with the Eating Disorders Program at The Menninger Clinic, in a clinic press release. "But if exercising is interfering in a person's life,
and it is compulsory, then it may be a problem.”

Fassihi treats patients in the Eating Disorders Program who over-exercise in an attempt to burn off calories, build muscle or attain physical perfection. It is common for patients with exercise disorders to also have an eating disorder, Fassihi says. Problems occur when body perception doesn’t match reality.

As with eating disorders, persons involved in activities or professions that require physical beauty or high levels of physical performance, such as athletes and dancers, are particularly vulnerable to developing exercise disorders. High achievers with perfectionist personalities are also vulnerable. Both men and women can have an exercising disorder, but they often have different goals for their exercise regimens. Women seek the lean look and typically exercise aerobically to become thin. Men want to bulk up and lift weights to increase muscle mass.

“If you have an exercising disorder, you also may be very preoccupied about your body’s appearance, weight and muscle mass.” Fassihi says. “You spend a lot of time looking at yourself, scrutinizing yourself, measuring yourself and constantly working out to create the muscle mass or lean body that you want.”

“Over-exercising can cause significant damage to the body,” Fassihi adds. “It can increase the risk of injuries for both men and women. Women may be more at risk for osteoporosis if they are over-exercising and restricting their food intake, and they may stop menstruating completely. Men may use steroids and protein powders to help them achieve their goals, leading to other health problems.”

If you believe you have an exercise disorder or are at risk for developing an exercise disorder, seek help from a trusted advisor, such as a coach, teacher, doctor or mental-health professional.

—Source: The Menninger Clinic (www.menningerclinic.com)

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