



Mental Health

Melanie Adams, PhD, CSCS, AT-Ret

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- Increase awareness of mental health as part of patient-centered health care.
- Identify signs and symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and eating disorders.
- Consider the role of an athletic trainer in a comprehensive medical team that educates, recognizes, and refers athletes with psychological concerns.
- Understand how physical activity contributes to positive mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is more than the absence of a psychological concern, such as clinical depression, an eating disorder, or substance abuse. It is a state of well-being that enables people to deal with the normal stresses of life and realize their potential personally and professionally.¹ Regular physical activity promotes physical and mental health. Longitudinal cohort studies are evidence that regular exercise lessens the risk of depression, reduces stress and anxiety, and improves quality of life. The mechanisms by which physical activity affects mental health are less well understood than those discussed in Chapter 2, but it is clear that meeting the American College of Sports Medicine guideline for physical activity (at least 150 minutes/week of moderate physical activity) is as important for the brain as it is for the heart. Emotions are not separate from physiology. Feelings of stress, anger, worry, and disappointment are linked to the release of hormones and neurotransmitters that change how cells repair and replicate throughout the body.^{2,3}

Participation in sports is believed to have a positive effect on the social, physical, and emotional development of young people, and dedication to one's sport is positively viewed in