

The Delusional Addiction & Ignorance Associated with Fitness Regimes

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the risks of exercise regimes that, while intended to promote health, may instead cause physical and psychological harm. Both the public and professional athletes are vulnerable—athletes face intense pressure to adhere to extremely demanding training programs, often under the influence of under-qualified trainers, resulting in excessive injury, career-ending conditions, or even suicide.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

A balanced lifestyle, attitude, and a knowledgeable understanding is essential for physical and mental health. However, exercise is increasingly pursued as an end in itself, sometimes to the point of addiction, at the expense of other meaningful activities. This trend raises questions about the causes of exercise-related injuries and health issues—whether they are self-imposed, due to inadequate ill-conceived ideation and choices, or inevitable environmental factors.

Technological advancements have reduced the need for natural movement, leading to artificial methods of maintaining and supporting health, such as gym-based exercise, and increased sedentary behaviour. Despite these changes, most modern illnesses and injuries, including obesity and diabetes, are linked to lifestyle choices. High-risk sports carry inherent dangers, and individuals must weigh these risks. Professional athletes, however, often have little choice but to comply with potentially harmful regimes.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PROFESSIONAL SPORT

Mental health is integral to overall well-being. Athletes are frequently encouraged to ignore their need for rest, leading to increased rates of mental health issues and suicide. For example, the suicide rate among cricketers is significantly higher than in the general population, suggesting that the pressures of professional sport can be as damaging as post-traumatic stress disorder. 'Cricket has this dreadful, hidden burden,' said Frith, one of Britain's best-known cricket writers and a former editor of Wisden Cricket Monthly. 'It must now answer the very serious question of whether it gradually transforms unwary cricket-loving boys into brooding, insecure and ultimately self-destructive men.'

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE

Modern exercise routines can be detrimental, particularly when performed with excessive intensity and inadequate recovery. Continuous weightlifting or rapid repetitions without breaks are dangerous and are likely to cause harm. I witness with alarm the ignorance of physiological knowledge whereby the pumping press-up exercise step ups etc and the like are

accepted as necessary for fitness? How is it possible that my own training in exercise therapy is so different?

My research and clinical experience emphasise the importance of balanced exercise and proper rest. In response, I developed the Health Swing (Thomson, 2013), a device designed to promote balanced, whole-body exercise and rehabilitation.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Medical specialisation has led to a fragmented approach to health, with technology often replacing face-to-face consultations and even risking misdiagnosis. A more holistic understanding of the patient is essential for effective care. Particularly in mental health where so often there is the need to dig beneath what the presenting symptoms are.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AVOID DAMAGING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH BECOME RESPONSIBLE

1. **Maintain Balance in Exercise:** Pursue exercise as part of a balanced lifestyle, not as an end in itself. Avoid excessive or compulsive exercise routines that neglect other meaningful activities.
2. **Prioritise Rest and Recovery:** Ensure adequate rest between exercise sessions. Ignoring the need for rest can increase the risk of injury and mental health issues, especially for athletes under pressure.
3. **Seek Qualified Guidance:** Train under knowledgeable and qualified professionals. Avoid regimes led by under-qualified trainers, as these can result in excessive injury or long-term harm.
4. **Understand Your Own Limits:** Recognise and respect your physical and psychological boundaries. Excessive intensity and rapid repetitions without breaks are dangerous.
5. **Adopt a Holistic Approach to Health:** Consider both physical and mental health as integral to overall well-being. Medical specialisation can fragment care, so aim for a holistic understanding of your health needs.
6. **Be Mindful of Technological Influences:** Modern technology has reduced natural movement, leading to increased sedentary behaviour. Counteract this by incorporating natural movement and whole-body exercise into your routine.
7. **Weigh the Risks of High-Intensity Sports:** High-risk sports carry inherent dangers. Individuals should carefully weigh these risks, while professional athletes may need additional support due to limited choices.
8. **Monitor Mental Health Closely:** Mental health issues, including depression and suicide, are prevalent among athletes facing intense pressure. Regularly assess your mental well-being and seek help when needed.

Finishing on a even more sobering note. When I was training at Pinderfields Hospital in Yorkshire, one of the lecturers was Paddy Armour who later became the England rugby physiotherapist. One day he came into the lecture room after seeing the x-rays of a rugby player who had to end his career because bone cells had infiltrated his quadriceps muscle due to beginning exercise too early after injury. This was meant to alarm us and it did. So in some convoluted way this article is a tribute to Paddy a great therapist but also a very likeable character.

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