



Does this sound like you? Are you beginning to worry that your exercise routine is interfering with your life?

Compulsive exercise (also called **obligatory exercise** and **anorexia athletica**) is defined as when you no longer choose to exercise but **feel compelled to do so**. Feelings of guilt and anxiety accompany an inability to work out. Basically, exercise becomes the focus of your life, squeezing out other important life activities.

The new Food Guide Pyramid recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity most or every day of the week. Exercising beyond these requirements may be okay for some but for some may signal compulsive behavior. Exercise needs are highly individual so the line between exercising for health and compulsive exercising often gets blurred. Clearly, several workouts a day, every day is overdoing it for most people.

To assess whether or not you are addicted to exercise, answer the following questions:

- ✓ Do you feel guilty if a day goes by when you don't work out?
- ✓ Are you depressed if you are unable to exercise?
- ✓ Do you have injuries that don't seem to heal?
- ✓ Do you feel tired and lethargic, yet still have trouble sleeping?
- ✓ Are you reluctant to take time off to heal injuries?
- ✓ Are you ignoring aspects of your work, social life or family life?
- ✓ Do you increase or decrease your exercise, based on your weight or what you have eaten?
- ✓ Do you feel compelled to work out even if you are tired or injured?
- ✓ Do you suffer from insomnia, undesired weight loss, fatigue, lethargy, irritability, multiple chronic injuries, stress fractures, and in women loss of menstrual cycle?

If you answered "yes" to several of the above questions, you are probably exercising too much.

The American College of Sports Medicine (americanheart.org/fitness) has issued the following guidelines for physical activity:

AEROBIC

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| <u>Frequency</u> | 3-5 days per week |
| <u>Intensity</u> | 50-85% estimated maximum heart rate, or exercise perceived to be “somewhat hard” or “hard” |
| <u>Duration</u> | 20-60 minutes of continuous exercise |

RESISTANCE

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|---------------------------|--|
| <u>Frequency</u> | 2-3 days per week |
| <u>Intensity/Duration</u> | 1-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions; 10-12 total exercises, one for each major muscle Group (chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps, quadriceps, hamstrings, gluteals, calves and core muscles (abs and low back) |

WAYS TO DEAL WITH COMPULSIVE EXERCISING

- *Focus on health and fitness instead of appearance*
- *Listen to your body. When your body says “I’m tired” or “I’m in pain”, stop*
- *Build rest days into your exercise regimen*
- *Avoid connecting eating with exercise*
- *Don’t let exercise determine your self worth*
- *Vary the intensity of your workout*
- *Make an appointment with Maria Larkin, Nutrition Counselor, or Peter Welch, Wellness Educator/Counselor by calling 862-3823*

Source: Carol L. Otis, M.D., and Roger Goldingay, “Exercise Abuse – Have You gone too Far? Shape, October 1991, pages 90-93.

For more information, contact the Office of Health Education and Promotion, Health Services
(603) 862-3823 | <http://www.unh.edu/health-services>