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[An article on this topic is available in this issue of AFP.](#)

The Female Athlete Triad

What is the female athlete triad?

The female athlete triad is a disorder that has three parts. It affects (1) your eating habits, (2) your menstrual periods and (3) the strength of your bones. If you have the female athlete triad, you've stopped eating normally. Your menstrual periods have stopped or have become irregular. You may also have osteoporosis. This is a disease that makes your bones thin and weak. Without treatment, the loss of bone strength may last forever.

What are the risk factors for female athlete triad?

- Being a competitive athlete
- Playing sports that require you to check your weight often
- Not having time to spend with your friends because your sport takes up all your free time
- Exercising more than is necessary for your sport
- Being pushed by your coach or your parents to win at all costs

What are the signs of female athlete triad?

Some symptoms of the female athlete triad are weight loss, absent or irregular periods, fatigue and stress fractures.

Why should I worry about this now, while I'm young?

If you don't have periods for more than three to four months, it can hurt your bone strength. You start to lose strength in your bones after only a few months with no periods.

How is the female athlete triad diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you some questions and do a physical exam. Your doctor may ask you about your periods, exercise patterns and eating habits. Your doctor may also ask you if you take any medicines such as birth control pills, laxatives or diet pills.

How is the female athlete triad treated?

Your doctor will talk with you about changing the way you eat and the way you exercise. After you make only a few changes, your regular periods should come back. If not, your doctor may talk with you about taking some medicines such as birth control pills or hormones (like estrogen and progesterone) to stop your body from losing any more bone strength.

How can I keep the female athlete triad from happening?

- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet
- Exercise in moderate amounts
- Tell your doctor about any changes in your periods

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit familydoctor.org for information on this and many other health-related topics.

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