

Depression and Mood Disorders

What Student-Athletes Should Know

Feeling sad, irritable or having shifting moods can be a normal response to life events, but persistent mood changes that feel overwhelming or interfere with daily life may be signs of something more serious. Understanding and recognizing the signs of depression and mood disorders can be a first step to seeking support.

~35%
of student-athletes
feel mentally
exhausted.

WHAT ARE DEPRESSION AND MOOD DISORDERS?

Depression and mood disorders are mental health conditions that involve changes in mood or energy, are intense, long-lasting or interfere with daily life and academic and athletic performance. Common mood disorders include:

- **Major Depressive Disorder** occurs when someone experiences episodes of persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness or loss of interest in activities that lasts for weeks to months and affect everyday life.
- **Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia)** is chronic, lower-level depression that lasts two years or more and can make it hard to feel motivated or positive.
- **Bipolar Disorder** is characterized by mood cycles that shift between periods of elevated mood and periods of feeling down, sad or withdrawn.

Recognizing the Signs

Changes in behavior, attitudes and academic or athletic performance may be signs of depression or mood disorders, such as:

- Feeling sad, hopeless, “empty” or losing interest in activities.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating in class or during athletic activity.
- Changes in energy, motivation or trouble concentrating.
- Pulling away from teammates, classes or social activities.
- Feelings of worthlessness or thoughts of self-harm – signs to seek help right away.
- Feelings of unusual irritability, anger or frustration.

What To Do

Depression and mood disorders are common and treatable, and help is available.

If you have concerns, consider:

- Reaching out to a coach, family member or other trusted adult.
- Connecting with a licensed mental health provider or team physician who can explain treatment options privately and confidentially.
- If you’re concerned about a teammate, start a conversation: Share your concerns, listen empathetically and encourage them to seek help.

“I’ve noticed you haven’t seemed like yourself lately. How are you doing?”

You are not alone and help is available.



See [NCAA Mental Health Best Practices](#) for more information.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call, text or chat 988.