

An informational resource for elite biathletes, coaches and support staff

Depression

33.6% of elite athletes and 26.4% of former elite athletes report symptoms of anxiety/depression. (1) Depression is a treatable mental health condition, and early detection and treatment leads to better outcomes.

Signs and Symptoms

- Persistent sadness or empty mood
- Dramatic changes in sleep, appetite, concentration, and energy
- Loss of engagement during training camps or travel
- Increased self-criticism after errors
- Withdrawal from teammates, meals, or team activities
- Persistent fatigue not explained by training load
- Noticeable changes in confidence
- Statements suggesting hopelessness about selection or future in the sport
- Suicidal thoughts

What athletes can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and seek help early from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed mental health provider
- Understand that seeking help early is a performance decision, not a weakness
- Connection can help. Reach out to a trusted friend, coach, or administrator or contact a local mental health provider/suicide prevention helpline (refer to country-specific contact list under "Find Help Now")
- Track mood changes alongside training load, sleep, and recovery
- Speak up if training or competition starts to feel emotionally overwhelming or meaningless
- Practice daily self-care: this includes getting restful sleep, social connection, effectively managing stressful situations, and addressing symptoms of depression

What coaches and support staff can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and promote help seeking behaviour and support from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed mental health provider
- Normalize mental health discussions as part of daily performance check-ins
- Avoid interpreting withdrawal or irritability as "poor attitude"
- Monitor cumulative stress during travel-heavy competition blocks
- Reinforce that missed shots or poor results do not define athlete value
- Reduce stigma by visibly supporting mental health care within the program
- Know your National Federation's written mental health referral protocols

Remember:

Depression is common, treatable, and manageable - especially when addressed early. Mental health care is part of elite performance and long-term wellbeing.

(1) This factsheet is intended for education and performance support. It does not replace individualised psychological care where needed. IOC Mental Health in Elite Athletes Toolkit, 2021. Other content adapted from NCAA and NAMI.