

An informational resource for elite biathletes, coaches and support staff

Sleep-Related Problems

49% of Olympic athletes would be classified as “poor sleepers”. Sleep-related problems include insufficient sleep, difficulty falling or staying asleep, or misalignment of sleep-wake patterns. (1)

These disorders are treatable, and early identification and management support both health and performance in elite athletes.

Signs and Symptoms

Night-time

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Frequent awakenings or early morning waking
- Restless or non-restorative sleep
- Nightmares or racing thoughts at bedtime

Daytime

- Persistent fatigue or sleepiness
- Reduced concentration, decision-making, or reaction time
- Irritability or low mood
- Increased reliance on caffeine or stimulants

What athletes can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and seek help early from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed sleep or mental health provider
- Maintain regular sleep and wake times where possible, including during travel and competition periods
- Identify factors that disrupt sleep (travel, late training sessions, pain, anxiety, screen use, caffeine)
- Practice good sleep hygiene: create a wind-down routine, optimise the sleep environment, and allow adequate time for sleep

What coaches and support staff can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and promote early help seeking behaviour and support from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed sleep or mental health provider
- Support athletes by considering sleep when planning training times, travel schedules, and recovery days
- Avoid normalising chronic fatigue as “part of being elite”
- Know your National Federation’s written mental health referral protocols

Remember:

Sleep is not passive recovery - it is a core performance skill. Protecting sleep supports accuracy, resilience, and long-term career sustainability.

(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.