



## **How to Determine if a Child is Over - Exercising**

Warning signs that a child may be over-exercising include:

- Seeming anxious or guilty when a workout is missed.
- If a workout is missed, exercising twice as long the next time.
- Constant preoccupation with weight and exercise routine attending workouts when tired, sick, or injured.
- Feeling obligated to attend sessions.
- Avoiding sitting still or relaxing due to worrying that they are not burning enough calories.
- Significant weight loss.
- Exercises more when she eats more (eg around events like Easter/Christmas).
- Skipping seeing friends, and forsaking responsibilities to make more time for exercise.
- Seeming to base how they feel about themselves on how much they work out or how hard they train.
- Never being satisfied with their physical achievements.

The pressures of some sports may inadvertently encourage this kind of behaviour. Sports like gymnastics (for females), and ballet can indirectly pressure females to reduce weight; they have a thin-body ideal. Runners also frequently fall into a cycle of obsessive workouts.

### **Getting Help for Your Child**

If warning signs of compulsive or obsessive behaviour are noted, contact the child's parents and recommend they consult their doctor to discuss your concerns. Since compulsive exercise can be linked to an eating disorder, a community agency that focuses on treating these disorders might be able to offer advice or referrals.

Addressing this problem will take an extended period of time (sometimes even years) and will most likely involve a team approach by doctors, therapists and dietitians.

### **Avoiding Compulsive Behaviour**

Some tips to avoiding compulsive behaviour in children are:

- Encourage a healthy approach to food and fitness
- Involve the child in food preparation and planning nutritious meals
- Combine activity and fun by going for a walk or bike ride together as a family
- Avoid fixating on physical flaws in the child's body or emphasising them in others
- Avoid placing too much pressure on children to succeed at their sport or activity
- Compliment them for other achievements and for general effort
- Be there to support the child