With involvement in sport comes a possibility of a physical injury. Every athlete knows that each time they step out on a field whether it is for practice or a competition, they expose themselves to a risk of getting injured, which may be one of the most stressful experiences in one’s athletic career. A physical injury causes a series of psychological, emotional, and social responses, and impacts one’s sense of identity (Albinson & Petrie, 2003; Bejar & Butryn, 2016; Madrigal & Gill, 2014). A five-year longitudinal study conducted by Kerr et al. (2014), estimated that collegiate student-athletes suffered 1,053,370 injuries. This represents an average of 210,674 total injuries per year, among which 63.8% occurred during practice.
Clinical Symptoms

Athletes who return to active participation before they are psychologically ready are predisposed to experience additional psychological (i.e. depression and anxiety) and physical (i.e. reinjury) challenges (DeGaetano et al., 2016). Athletes have adaptive or mixed responses to injury, however negative postinjury reactions are the most common (Appaneal et al., 2009). When athletes experience an injury they are subjected to various psychological detriments including lowered self-esteem (Smith et al., 1990; Tracey, 2003), mood disturbances (DeGaetano et al., 2016; Roiger et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2017), feelings of helplessness (Bejar & Butryn, 2016; Carson & Polman, 2008), social isolation (Madrigal & Gill, 2014), fear of recurrent injuries (Madrigal & Gill, 2014), and loss of their athletic identity (Granito, 2001; Madrigal & Gill, 2014). One’s athletic identity is defined as the degree to which one defines oneself in the role of an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993).

Often time injuries require some form of the rehabilitation process and the length and the extent of rehabilitation depend on severity and type of injury. Athletes understand the value and need for rehabilitation; however, athletic identity is a factor that influences rehabilitation overadherence or premature return to athletic participation after an injury (Podlog et al., 2013). Hilliard et al. (2017) found athletes with high athletic identity are more likely to experience negative sport-related outcomes, such as psychological disturbances, playing through pain, and conformity to masculine norms, as a result of injury.

Negative Responses to Injury: lower self-esteem, mood disturbance, helplessness, social isolation, and loss of athletic identity
Implications for Professionals and Athletes

So what can athletes and professionals in the field do to assist in mental health difficulties associated with injury?

**Implications for Professionals**
Professionals can start the therapeutic relationship by first explaining the nature of the relationship, the services, and highlight the potential benefits for the athletes.
- Approach athletes from a holistic standpoint and conduct a thorough biopsychosocial assessment, inquiring about various aspects of one’s life.
- Engage in continuous and frequent assessments when working with athletes.
- Be knowledgeable of different sport athletes may manifest collectivism or individualism in accordance with their sport ethic, their personal cultural backgrounds, and how those may impact formation of one’s athletic identity.
- Address identity as a part of growth and development.
- Provide guidance in the development of self-awareness and explore intersectionality of their identities.
- Consider athlete’s readiness to seek mental health support and facilitate collaboration with athletic trainers, coaches, athletic advisors, and parents.

**Implications for Athletes**
Speak to a person you feel comfortable with about your experiences and ask for mental health support resources.
- Form a circle of social support you can reach out to when needed, not only when injured.
- Explore interests outside of sport to support formation of various identities.
- Develop a recovery and rehabilitation plan you can stick to, which can help you stay focused on everyday small improvements instead of focusing on what you are missing due to injury.

**Coping Skills**
- Relaxation exercises (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation)
- Visualization and Imagery
- Short-term and long-term goal setting
- Mindfulness
What is Mindfulness?

As listed above, mindfulness is an effective coping skill for addressing mental health struggles when injured (Ivarsson et al., 2015; Moesch et al., 2020; Mohammed et al 2018; Peterson & Olson 2017). Modern mindfulness comes from Eastern meditative practices and simply means “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness is not only a state, but a trait that can be measured and cultivated, enhanced through practice and training. Mindfulness is like a muscle that can be trained and developed through regular exercises and training. Research into mindfulness began for stress reduction and chronic pain with the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the late 1970s and 1980s (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Later it became a treatment for recurrent depression and anxiety through Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Goldberg et al., 2019). Decades of research and randomized controlled trials support mindfulness as an intervention to improve mental health. Mindfulness has also been researched for use in sport through the Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE), which takes some of the fundamental mindfulness exercises and focuses on use in a sport or other high performance setting (Kaufman et al., 2018).

How Mindfulness Helps:
Decrease stress, rumination, and relapses in depression.
Conclusion

In a culture that values speed, resilience, and fortitude, it is understandable that athletes are wanting to get back from injury as soon as possible. However, mindfulness, and slowing down help athletes recover faster. Sport psychologists and mental health professionals in the field have the opportunity to assist athletes in bringing compassion to themselves and their desire to get back to sport quickly. Athletes can have both: they can want to get back immediately and understand that speed may not apply to healthy recovery from injury. For more information on the positive effects of mindfulness, see the resources listed.

Mindfulness Resources:
www.Mindful.org

https://www.mindfulnessportperformance.org/

https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/resources/

https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindfulness/meditations

https://sites.google.com/cua.edu/mindfulnessandsportlab