



Coping Strategies of Special Olympics Athletes in Canada: The Connection between Coping and Overall Health Behaviours

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PROJECT SUMMARY

People with IDD often have more health problems than others, like higher rates of obesity, heart disease, and mental health issues. These challenges can be made worse by not getting enough exercise, not eating well, and having less access to health care. We do not know much about how athletes with IDD deal with stress or how this connects to their health.

This project looked at how Special Olympics athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) handle stress and how their coping strategies may affect their health. We collected health information from athletes during the 2020 National Games in Thunder Bay through the Healthy Athletes program. This program offers free health screenings and teaches athletes about healthy living and coping with stress.

What Are Coping Strategies? Coping strategies are the ways people deal with stress. They can help someone feel better and stay calm. There are two main types:

- **Active coping** includes things like exercising, stretching, deep breathing, talking to someone, or doing something fun like listening to music.
- **Passive coping** means avoiding stress by doing things like watching TV, playing video games, or sleeping.

What We Found: Most athletes (78%) used active coping strategies, which was more than expected. Only 22% used passive coping or none at all. The study found no clear link between how athletes coped with stress and their BMI or blood pressure, though some sports had more athletes with high blood pressure. Athletes who ate more fruits and vegetables were more likely to use active coping strategies and often avoided sugary drinks and snacks. Older athletes tended to use active coping more, while male athletes were more likely to have higher blood pressure.

Why is this Important: Many athletes are already using healthy ways to manage stress. These habits may also help them eat better and stay active. Coaches, staff, and volunteers can support athletes by encouraging active coping strategies. This could help improve their overall health in the long run.

KEY MESSAGES

Healthy coping strategies support well-being: Athletes who use active coping strategies like exercising, talking to someone, or doing calming activities are better able to manage stress and support their mental and physical health.

Healthy habits and coping go together: Athletes who eat healthy foods like fruits and vegetables are more likely to use active coping strategies. Promoting healthy eating and physical activity can help athletes handle stress more effectively.

Coping skills can grow over time: Older athletes tend to use more active coping strategies. This suggests that with support and experience, all athletes can build stronger ways to manage stress.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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