



Chapter 3: Sports Medicine Resources

Guidelines for Certified Athletic Trainers Confronted with Pregnancy in Female Student-Athletes

The role of a certified athletic trainer is an important one. The certified athletic trainer or team physician is often the first to recognize that a student-athlete is pregnant or the first person approached in confidence within the athletics department. As such, the certified athletic trainer should be well-versed in the institution's pregnancy policies, and should be able to access resources easily.

Anticipating the Situation

- Review the NCAA Model Pregnancy and Parenting Policy ("Model Policy") and those of your athletics department.
- Review the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Committee Opinion, "Exercise during Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period," ACOG Committee Opinion No. 267.
- Discuss pregnancy and parenting medical issues in advance with your supervising physician and those in the athletics department, including coaches and administrators of both male and female teams.

- If your institution lacks a pregnancy and parenting policy, help develop one and participate in periodic reviews of student-athlete pregnancy and parenting policies.

Provide Emotional Help

- If a student-athlete approaches you during athletics activity or in the clinic setting, go to a private space where you cannot be accidentally overheard or seen by teammates, coaches, or other bystanders.
- Review the institution’s pregnancy and parenting policy with the student-athlete or the Model Policy, if your institution has not yet adopted a policy.
- Remind the student-athlete that her scholarship and team membership are not at risk.
- A good reply to student-athletes revealing their own or their partner’s pregnancy is:

“I’m glad you’re telling me about this and understand you may have many questions. I want to provide you with the information, time and support you need to make these personal decisions. Let’s figure out how we can do that.”
- Support the student-athlete. Ask non-judgmental questions and give the student-athlete time to work through emotions and decisions.
 - “Please tell me whatever you’d like.”
 - “How are you feeling?”

- Ask the student-athlete how she feels about discussing her pregnancy with others.
 - “Is Coach aware of the situation? How do you feel about talking about it with her/him?”
 - “Is your family aware of the situation?”
 - “Is your partner aware of the situation?”
- If you have past experience with pregnant student-athletes and this particular coach, be candid about the experience.
 - “In the past when this has occurred, Coach has been very supportive and helpful. It helps to have Coach aware because she/he will have a little more insight as to why you may not be performing to the same standards. But if you’re not ready to talk about it yet, we can hold off discussing with Coach and figure out how to navigate those hurdles.”
 - “In the past when this has occurred, Coach has not been very supportive. You have the right to work with me and the team physician, keeping your medical status confidential. If you decide to carry the pregnancy to term, we may need to modify your workouts and competition schedule as your pregnancy progresses, which will involve Coach.”
 - “Would you like me to go with you to talk with Coach? Sometimes it helps to have someone else there.”
- Encourage the student-athlete to make use of the athletics department’s mental health counselors.

- Reassure her that she probably has some time on her side to decide whether to carry the pregnancy to term, usually until she is 12 weeks pregnant.
- Share with her that many other student-athletes have successfully encountered pregnancy, and there is usually no reason to make hasty decisions.

Medical Help and Confidentiality

- Reassure the student-athlete that you can maintain confidentiality within the medical team as long as it is medically safe to do so.
- Remind the student-athlete that as a certified athletic trainer, you cannot make medical decisions regarding pregnancy, but that you are part of a medical team that will work with her to provide her with the optimal health care.
- Reassure the student-athlete that if she decides to carry the pregnancy to term, there are few risks to athletic participation in uncomplicated pregnancies, particularly in the first trimester. However, she should seek out appropriate maternal health care. Help her identify appropriate maternal health care if asked to do so.
- Encourage her to work in collaboration with her maternal health care provider and the athletics department medical staff.

“I would like to inform our team physician of your pregnancy so that we can start to identify continued participation parameters and establish a baseline health status. Do you feel comfortable with this plan?”

- Leave the conversation with a follow-up appointment.
- Explain to the student-athlete that you may be checking in with her more frequently in order to protect her health and safety, but then try not to attract others’ attention when doing so.

Warning Signs to Terminate Exercise While Pregnant:

- Vaginal Bleeding
- Shortness of Breath Before Exercise
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Chest Pain
- Calf Pain or Swelling
- Pre-term Labor
- Decreased Fetal Movement
- Amniotic Fluid Leakage
- Muscle Weakness