

Body Image

By: Ken Hunt, Owner of Steel Gym and AFI-certified Fitness Expert

Does this sound like you?

You are the first one at the gym in the morning. You continue to train despite a nagging injury. Your idea of free time is heading back to the gym for an hour or so of cardio. Missing a workout is not an option.

Are you obsessed with exercise? As yourself these questions:

- Do I feel that I absolutely cannot miss my workout? If I do miss a workout, do I feel extremely guilty and uneasy?
- Do I feel that I have to exercise even if I notice that instead of helping my body, I am damaging it?
- Am I preoccupied with my body's appearance, weight and muscle mass?
- Do I spend a lot of time looking at myself, scrutinizing myself and measuring myself?
- Am I getting more injuries?
- Do I hear family and friends expressing concern about my exercise regimen or appearance, yet I still don't stop exercising?
- Do I feel like I can't stop exercising?

If you answered "Yes" to 3 or more questions, then exercising might be interfering in your life. And you may be at risk for developing an exercise disorder.

High achievers with perfectionist personalities are also vulnerable. Men and women can have an exercising disorder, but they often have different goals for their exercise regimens. Women seek the "lean look" and exercise aerobically to become thin. Men want to get bigger and lift weights to increase muscle mass.

Distorted body image, also called body dysmorphia, is a common component of an exercising disorder. Persons with body dysmorphia have a distorted view and exaggerated vision of their appearance. Thin women may think they are too big, and muscular men may think they are too puny or scrawny.

Overexercising can cause significant damage to the body. It can increase the risk

of injuries for both men and women. Women may be more at risk for osteoporosis if they are overexercising and restricting their food intake. Men may use steroids and protein powders to help them achieve their goals, leading to other health problems.

Overexercising can also cause stress fractures, which can impede walking. Constant repetitive exercise can cause wear and tear on the body's muscle, bones and joints--in severe cases making joint replacement surgery necessary at a young age.

Many people who overexercise are reluctant to admit their behavior is problematic,. Exercise provides them with a sense of control, power, and in some cases, superiority. Exercise also relieves anxiety and releases endorphins, which provide a sense of euphoria. We live in an appearance-oriented society, so we always want to look our best, no matter what the price.

If you had an addiction that was bad for you, you would give it up cold turkey. You don't want to give up exercising, because it's good for you, but you need to learn how to exercise moderately in a healthy way.

Confront your anxiety about not exercising, and learn other methods to help relieve anxiety such as relaxation and breathing exercises. You can also participate in a body image group to identify negative beliefs you have about your body and how to dispute those beliefs. Also, don't be afraid to seek professional help and guidance. Remember this is an addiction and can have serious effects on your long-term health.

Steel Gym has been named "#1 Gym in New York" two years in a row by the American Fitness Institute for "cost, cleanliness, equipment and service," and has been called "the last real gym left in New York" by famed bodybuilder Victor Martinez. Ken Hunt has been featured in the New York Times, Men's Fitness, GENRE, HX, Stonewall News, EXIT South Africa and more. The gym is located at 146 W. 23rd St, New York, NY. For more information on Steel Gym, please call 212.352.9876 or visit www.steelgym.com.