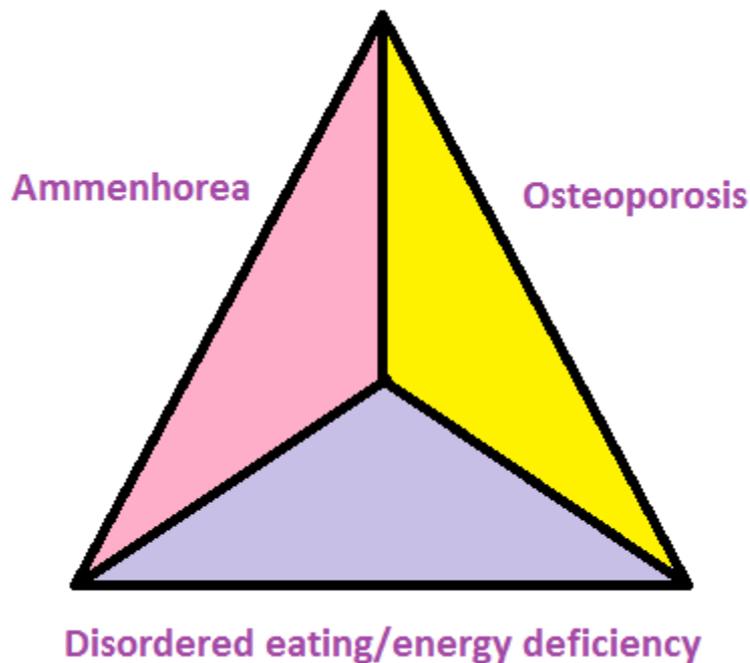


Female Triad



What is the 'Female Triad'?

The female triad is a collection of related medical conditions that results from low energy levels due to poor oral intake associated with an eating disorder, high levels of exercise, or both. A reduction in energy levels can result in weak bones (osteoporosis) as well as irregular or no periods (oligomenorrhea/amenorrhea).

Who gets it?

The female triad is often seen in woman that are doing a lot of sport which requires the athlete to have a low levels of body fat, for example athletics, long distance running, ballet and gymnastics. Those who have experienced remarks about their weight from parents, coaches or team mates may be at risk. Those who have previously suffered from depression or have obsessional or perfectionism personality traits may also be more susceptible. There may also be a higher chance of developing osteoporosis and an eating disorder if other people in the family have had these problems.

Signs of symptoms:

Some of the symptoms associated with the female triad are similar to those also seen in eating disorders and include dry skin, obvious weight loss, hair loss, feeling cold, anaemic, low blood pressure and tiredness. A body mass index (BMI) score of lower than 17.5kn/m^2 is also a useful indicator of insufficient energy stores. Other signs may be associated with weak bones, for example pain from stress fractures caused by

repetitive force through the bones in sports like running, broken bones from low impact injuries and increased time for healing when injured.

How to treat it:

In energy levels are the main cause, therefore the main treatment is to increase food intake and ensure that energy being taken in to the body is more than the energy being used up in exercise. It may be necessary to reduce exercise levels until periods restart and become regular and allowing time for bones to become stronger again.

A bone scan to look at bone density may need to be done if there is a history of fractures. This will give an indication of how strong and healthy the bones are. The results of this can determine whether medication is needed. Vitamin D supplements can be used to encourage calcium uptake in the bones, which keeps them strong. Another group of drugs called bisphosphonates may also be used on a case- by- case basis.

The OCP is no longer recommended as a treatment as it doesn't restore natural oestrogen and can mask symptoms.

If there is underlying reasons for eating disorders linked with low mood and self esteem medical help may be sought to find methods of coping with these through psychotherapies or anti-depressant medication where appropriate.

How to prevent it:

Restrictive eating during exercise is a key factor in the development of the triad. Therefore, when training is increased it should be done gradually and eating habits should match this so that oral intake is also increased. Dietary advice may be incorporated in to athletes training programmes where possible to ensure this addressed. Dietary advice may also be sought from GPs and Sports Medicine doctors.