

Elite athletes’ overall oral health, values and related quality of life: a cross-sectional study

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BACKGROUND

Oral health is a fundamental component of general well-being, particularly in high-performance athletes. Physiological stress, high carbohydrate intake, dehydration, altered salivary flow, and limited access to dental care increase the risk of oral diseases such as caries, gingivitis, and periodontitis. Despite this, oral health remains an overlooked area in sports medicine — even though inflammation, pain, and compromised function can affect well-being and performance.

CONCLUSION

Elite athletes demonstrated a substantial burden of oral disease, despite expressing concern about oral health. Findings reveal a discordance between perceived and actual oral health status and underscore the functional and psychosocial implications of untreated oral conditions. These data highlight the imperative to: Implement structured preventive oral health programs Integrate dental screening and education into multidisciplinary sports health teams. Recognise oral health as a modifiable factor in performance and overall athlete well-being

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted involving 95 elite athletes (mean age: 27.4 ± 7.2 years; 74.7% male).Clinical data were collected according to WHO protocols and included: Dental caries: Assessed via the Decayed, Missing, and Filled Teeth (DMFT) index Periodontal status: Evaluated using the Community Periodontal Index (CPI)Orofacial trauma: Documented via clinical observation and self-report Participants completed a comprehensive questionnaire addressing: Sociodemographic variables Oral hygiene practices (brushing, flossing, dental attendance)Health values and concern related to oral health Oral Health Impact Profile (OHIP-14), a validated measure of OHRQoL across seven domains

RESULTS

- 26.7% classified as healthy
- 42.2% presented with gingivitis
- 31.1% diagnosed with periodontitis Caries experience (DMFT): Mean index of 3.2 (SD = 3.2), with component means of 1.5 (decayed), 0.4 (missing), and 1.3 (filled)Trauma prevalence: 14.8% of athletes exhibited orofacial trauma Oral health-related behaviors:
 - 94.7% reported daily tooth brushing
 - 56.8% used dental floss
 - 27.6% attended dental consultations biannually
- 41.4% sought dental care only when symptomatic Perceptions and beliefs:
 - 79.5% reported moderate-to-high concern for oral health
 - 50% were satisfied with their current oral health status
 - 83.6% did not perceive an impact of oral health on sports performance OHRQoL (OHIP-14):
 - Mean score: 8.8 ± 9.2
 - Athletes with periodontitis and poor oral hygiene behaviors had significantly higher OHIP-14 scores ($p < 0.05$), indicating a greater negative impact on quality of life

