

UW Health: College wrestlers who rapidly cut weight more prone to injury

Posted on Monday, Nov 14, 2022

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MADISON, Wis. – Collegiate wrestlers who cut weight through dehydration to compete at a lower weight class were more likely to be injured during competition and no more likely to win, according to a new study from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

Wrestlers compete in specific weight classes, and it is a widely held belief that competing at a lower weight offers a performance advantage, according to Dr. Erin Hammer, assistant professor of orthopedics, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, sports medicine physician, UW Health, and lead author of the study.

“Wrestlers rapidly lose weight via dehydration, using saunas, workouts and abstaining from fluids until after they are weighed an hour or two before the match,” she said. “After weigh-in, they attempt to rehydrate, but complete rehydration takes 24 to 48 hours.”

While the NCAA has taken steps to reduce harm from rapid weight cutting, including moving the weigh-in closer to the match time and establishing a lowest minimum weight class a wrestler can compete at, weight cutting remains omnipresent in wrestling, according to the authors.

“While stories about weight-cutting are part of wrestling culture, I believe we need to start the conversation about the harm of rapid weight-cutting,” Hammer said.

Researchers followed 67 NCAA Division 1 wrestlers over the course of seven

seasons of competition. The study found that the larger the percentage of body weight the wrestlers lost, the more likely they were to be injured during a competition.

“For every percent of weight lost, wrestlers had an 11% increased risk of injury during competition,” Hammer said.

Non-injured wrestlers lost an average of 5.7% of their body weight, compared with an average of a 7% loss for those who would go on to be injured during competition.

“We saw that athletes who were injured during matches cut 11.6 pounds on average compared to 9.5 pounds in athletes who didn’t get injured,” Hammer said.

In addition, wrestling while dehydrated at a lower weight was not associated with win percentage, according to the authors.

Among the 67 male wrestlers, 46 of them suffered a total of 53 unique injuries over seven seasons. The most common were knee injuries, followed by concussion and other head injuries, and shoulder injuries.

The [study](#) was published in the most recent issue of the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

A recorded interview with Hammer is available and she is available for interviews.