EATING DISORDER OR OVER-EXERCISE?

Excessive activity can contribute to the development of an eating disorder and continue once other aspects are normalised.

It can be identified by the following:

- Commitment to exercise far exceeds any reasonable effort to achieve physical fitness or good health
- Exercise becomes more solitary and less enjoyable
- Exercise continues despite injury or illness or pain
- Exercise continues despite significant weight loss to an unhealthy level
- The motivating factor for exercise is weight loss, rather than fitness or enjoyment
- There may be evidence of withdrawal symptoms, such as irritability, anxiety and depression when the person is unable to exercise
- Feelings of guilt exist where exercise is omitted or prohibited

Basic differences in motivation and secondary gains are often a simple indicator of whether excessive activity is related to eating disorder or over-exercise per se. People with eating disorders tend to focus on body image, whereas weight and shape issues, as they relate to cardiovascular health and fitness, are the focus points for the over-exerciser. Factors common to both eating disorders and excessive-exercisers include the use of exercise for deliberate mood manipulation and the over-importance of exercise in the self-evaluation and self-concept.