

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Train to Compete and Train to Win Stage Considerations Females ages 15-21+ and Females ages 18+*

Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity. Active for Life is the final destination for all Canadians in **Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)** – a training, competition and recovery pathway guiding an individual’s experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood.

In the **Train to Compete** stage, athletes focus on one sport in which they will train to excel, training to solidify their sport-specific and position-specific skills and physical capacities. Athletes in this stage are aiming to compete in national and international events. Only the most talented and dedicated athletes reach the **Train to Win** stage, pursuing high-intensity training to win international events.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE ATHLETES

Optimal performance atmosphere – CS4L-LTAD has brought attention to the fact that training programs for female athletes are often based on research and programs developed for male athletes, and may not adequately support female athletes in developing their full potential. An optimal performance atmosphere must consider the unique physical and psycho-social needs of female athletes. Coaches must consider communication styles, motivation and goal-setting, and skill development to help athletes cope with the pressures of training, competition, and other demands in their lives. Access to quality support staff, equipment, and training environments is also critical to success.

Injury prevention – Female athletes are at increased risk for certain injuries because of biomechanical, physiological, and psycho-social differences between females and males. Common mechanical injuries, including acute and chronic injuries to the anterior cruciate ligament, patellofemoral joint, and shoulder area, can be avoided with proper skill development and conditioning. High incidence of concussions requires education about and implementation of policy related to diagnosis, management and recovery. Energetic injuries, related to poor nutrition or caloric restriction, should be addressed through education of athletes, coaches, and families. The female athlete triad refers to poor nutrition or caloric restriction causing menstrual irregularities or amenorrhea, which reduces bone health, ultimately increasing

*Stage-related ages are guidelines only, and should consider developmental appropriateness and variations in readiness due to psycho-social factors.

risk for stress fractures and osteoporosis. Psycho-social injuries (“injuries of the heart”), including self-doubt, failure, rejection, and criticism, can have short and long-term impacts on training and performance.

Sexual and gender diversity – These LTAD stages correlate to the time when athletes will be expressing their sexuality and gender identity. Homophobia and transphobia undermine the powerful potential of sport, and create a toxic environment for athletes, coaches, and other support staff that do not conform to the heterosexual norm. It is essential to acknowledge sexual diversity and create safe and welcoming environments where athletes can be true to themselves with the confidence and security to reach their full potential.

Athlete retirement – At this stage, a number of factors can cause athletes to consider their future involvement in sport and physical activity, e.g. goal achievement or failure, aging out of a category or program, injury, or shifting priorities. Athletes will transition to the Active for Life stage, and should be supported in their retirement to connect with new competitive environments, different sports or physical activities, and/or leadership and career opportunities.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

LTAD Stage Considerations for Female Athletes series – <https://womenandsport.ca/learning-opportunities/presentations/long-term-development-for-women-and-girls/>
Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors – <https://womenandsport.ca/resources/publications/actively-engaging-women-and-girls/>
Other Actively Engaging Supplements
Recommendations for Coaches
Recommendations to Make Sport More Welcoming to Sexual and Gender Diversity
About CS4L and LTAD – www.sportforlife.ca

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