Canadian MSK Rehab Research Network

Research project title

We wanted to know

This review aimed to understand which health issues have been measured in retired athletes and how often female/woman health data are reported in existing studies.

What is the problem?

Research on the long-term health of retired athletes has mostly focused on males/men, meaning much less is known about health outcomes of females/women.

How did you study the problem?

Five databases were searched for primary studies reporting original health outcome data in retired athletes (no longer participating at their highest level of sport). Five reviewers independently screened and extracted study data in pairs. Health outcomes were classified into six domains: cardiovascular, reproductive/endocrine, cognitive, musculoskeletal, mental health and quality of life.

What did you find?

We included 333 studies involving nearly 98,000 retired athletes, with only 17% of participants were female/woman. Across all studies, more than 1,500 health outcomes were reported into the six health domains. Only 14% of outcomes had female/woman specific data; musculoskeletal and mental health outcomes were most frequently reported, while reproductive health was rarely examined.

How can this research be used?

Overall, female/woman health data remains under-represented in research on retired athletes. Improving the inclusion and reporting of female-specific health data is essential to better support women athletes' long-term health, injury prevention, and post-career care.

Cautions

This study did not include grey literature, meaning some outcomes may have been missed. Furthermore, data extraction and categorization involved some degree of subjectivity when classifying health outcomes into the six domains, which could have led to under/over-reporting of certain domains.

Reference: Schulz J, Brooks J, Hewitt C, Friedman D, Guilfoyle L, Palmer D, et al. 20 Life after sport: mapping health outcomes and female/woman-specific gaps in retired athletes – a scoping review. BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine. 2026;12:. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2026-sportskongres.20

Funding Sources: None.