

Super Sized Linemen in College Football: A Ticking Time Bomb?

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The body mass of college football lineman increases markedly during their time on campus and places them at higher risk for a number of post-competitive pathogenic chronic health consequences such as metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease. Because the large stature and body mass of college football lineman can be associated with future health problems, it is important that a new policy is developed to mandate universities to provide athletes with a reconditioning plan they can use to reduce and/or avoid this problem in the future. Recognition of problems associated with over-sized athletes is easily accepted intellectually. However, the practicalities of solving the problem have not been fully realized. The purpose of this presentation is to define the magnitude of the problem in active NCAA collegiate linemen.

Although competitive collegiate student-athletes might be assumed to be sheltered from risks of cardiovascular disease, a recent study by Buell et al. (2008) found a high incidence of metabolic syndrome and other associated adverse biomarkers for heart disease in current collegiate football linemen. Of the 70 athletes participating in the study, 34 were identified as having metabolic syndrome according to measures of blood pressure, waist circumference, fasting glucose, high-density lipoprotein, and triglycerides (Buell, et al., 2008). If the present physical activity of current football linemen does not seem to give enough protective benefit to avoid metabolic syndrome, this creates an even greater concern for these athletes when they discontinue participation in football. The findings of Buell et al. (2008) should generate significant doubt about the presumed health of current as well as post-competitive collegiate football linemen.

While the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has made strides within its legislation in the areas of drug testing and educational programs to protect the health of intercollegiate athletes, a program to educate and retrain college football linemen should be implemented to combat the health risks faced at the completion of their eligibility as a result of the lifestyles habits adopted as a student-athlete. The future health of football linemen warrants more preventive consideration than it may be receiving. Making a reconditioning program part of mandated NCAA legislation would go a long way in ensuring that football athletes who graduate from college are better informed when it comes to developing lifelong healthy habits. Athletes at risk for metabolic syndrome must be counselled about the related risks and educated about lifestyle alternatives that may decrease this risk.