

ROWING AUSTRALIA

BODY MASS MANAGEMENT FOR MAKING WEIGHT GUIDELINE

1. Introduction

Rowing Australia seeks to provide a safe sporting environment that promotes a pragmatic, safety focused approach to body mass management that discourages use of high-risk weight loss practices. All role holders within the organisation, including athletes, family members, coaches and performance support staff, have a responsibility to support a safe sporting environment and the right to expect that the sporting environment in which they work is safe and supportive. The guideline sets out actions that are implemented by the organisation to assist in providing this safe sporting environment.

Within rowing both coxswains and lightweight rowers are required to be a specific weight for competition. Athletes may manipulate their body mass to compete at a weight that is lighter than their normal training weight. Although strategies include long term changes in body composition, acute weight loss is typically undertaken in the period immediately before a competition weigh-in via dietary restriction, increased exercise, and other strategies that achieve moderate to severe dehydration. Acute weight loss practices may impair performance and result in serious health and safety risks. Tragically, athletes have died while “making weight” for competition. Rowing Australia endorses the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Making Weight in Weight Category Sports Best Practice Guidelines and in this guideline seeks to provide additional context relevant to the Rowing sport system specifically, outlining expected practice and behaviours in our senior elite athletes and fundamental philosophy in the management of pathway athletes.

2. Purpose of this document

The Rowing Australia Body Mass Management for Making Weight Guideline aims to assist our organisation to implement the practices required to provide a healthy sport system. The appropriate identification of an appropriate weight class and pragmatic approach to body mass management in our athletes is important in view of the significant ramifications of using high risk weight loss practices on an athlete’s health and performance. We prioritise the health and wellbeing of our athletes and believe all role holders in our sporting system have a part to play.

3. Organisational responsibilities

Rowing Australia will:

- Adopt, implement and comply with this guideline.
- Publish, distribute and promote this guideline.
- Promote and model appropriate standards of behaviour at all times.
- Deal with any complaints or concerns made under this guideline in a timely manner.
- Deal with any breaches of this guideline in an appropriate manner.
- Monitor and review this guideline regularly.

4. Individual responsibilities

Individuals bound by this guideline must:

- Make themselves aware of the contents of this guideline.
- Comply with all relevant provisions of the guideline.
- Place the health and wellbeing of athletes above other considerations.
- Be accountable for their behaviour.
- Seek to engage in upskilling in the area as required.

5. Who does this guideline apply to?

This guideline applies to all role holders within Rowing Australia including but not limited to:

- Athletes
- CEO and Board members
- High Performance Director
- Coaches
- Performance Support managers and practitioners
- For any other athletes, the purpose of this guideline is to provide guidance and education in relation to best practice supplement use

Rowing Australia recommends that all State Institutes/Academies of Sport and Clubs adopt this guideline.

6. Key Aspects for Supporting Making Weight Athletes

The appropriate management of body mass and related issues in our athletes are the outcomes of a healthy sport system and will be discussed individually in more detail below.

- **The Core Multidisciplinary Team (CMT)**

Rowing Australia recognises that the profession of the CMT provides a vital function in the appropriate identification of an appropriate weight class and pragmatic approach to body mass management in our athletes. For the high-performance program, Rowing Australia will utilise the CMT of sports doctor, sports dietitian and psychologist who will be responsible for the development of communication channels within the CMT and from the CMT to the broader support team.

As per the Olympic Movement Medical Code, all activities of the CMT should be based on the premise that the health and welfare of athlete are pre-eminent and prevail over competitive, economic, legal or political considerations. Although there are many aspects to their roles within the environment of weight category sports including education and the development of relevant policy, special attention needs to be given to scenarios in which athletes should be supported or mandated to receive individual attention from members of the CMT. Recommendations are provided in the table on the following page.

A sports dietitian should be the first practitioner within the CMT an athlete engages to identify an appropriate weight category and then subsequently design, implement and refine weight making plans. Having access to psychological support will enable greater provision of services to athletes at risk of disordered eating, and a doctor will be best positioned to assess changes in general health/physiological status, as well as enable any necessary diagnostic tests (blood chemistry, bone mineral density scans etc.). Good communication within the CMT is critical for optimal outcomes to be achieved for the athlete. Together the CMT can leverage each other's expertise to identify "at risk" athletes earlier in their progression to detrimental states.

Sports dietitians are referred to the [*Making Weight in Weight Category Sports Best Practice Guidelines for Performance Nutrition Practitioners.*](#)

- **Management of body mass**

- a) Optimised nutrition

Rowing Australia recognises that athletes should be able to access nutrition support that meets the criteria for optimised nutrition; a harmony between health and performance underpinned by concepts that are safe, supported, purposeful and individualised. An appropriately qualified and experienced Sports Dietitian must provide the nutritional education to athletes.

b) Low energy availability and other signs of Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (REDs)

Rowing Australia recognises that weight loss will necessitate the creation of an energy deficit, which if severe can result in low energy availability (LEA). If this is sustained, the syndrome known as relative energy deficiency in sport (REDs) can result, with significant health and performance implications. Athletes must be referred for appropriate professional assessment (or to the CMT where this exists within an organisation and is available to the athlete) and support in the circumstances below:

- Any athlete with known or suspected disordered eating;
- Any athlete with known or suspected LEA;
- Any athlete who is diagnosed with a bone stress injury and/or identified with menstrual dysfunction;
- Any athlete with recurrent injuries and/or illnesses.

Athletes who are identified in these categories should be provided with ongoing monitoring, support and regular review.

c) Early identification

Rowing Australia recognises that early identification of high-risk weight loss practices is important in reducing the risk to health and performance of inappropriate body mass management practices. Identification of suitability to compete in the weight category is advocated, with a focus of this decision being placed on the athletes presenting body mass and composition, complemented by other pertinent factors such as available time for body mass manipulation, prior body mass management experiences, current diet and training load, plus presenting metabolic and mental state. Athletes should be supported to create a sensible plan for progressive weight loss over time to avoid extreme weight loss practices. Where possible this should be provided locally throughout the domestic season and prior to selection into national teams. Rowing Australia can provide support to coaches and practitioners in this assessment and how best to source professional support for athletes in the local environment.

In addition, prior to confirmation of selection into an Australian Rowing team the following must be assessed

- Coxswains are confirmed to have a Body Mass Index (BMI) in the normal weight range when on weight i.e. 18.5 or higher, equivalent to a height of 172 cm or less.
- Coxswains who are approximately 40kg or less should be assessed by the CMT to ensure they are not at risk through hyperhydration practices to make weight.

- Lightweight should have a BMI of 20 or more when 59kg for females, equivalent to 171cm or less and on 72.5kg for males, equivalent to 189 cm or less.
- Exceptions may be considered after assessment by the CMT.

When coxswains and lightweight are selected into national teams from Junior through to Senior it is the responsibility of Rowing Australia to ensure appropriate nutrition education and support has been provided and that the athletes are safe to make weight.

d) Body composition assessment

Where body composition plays a role in sports performance, this role can be understood and integrated into an appropriate personalised plan for each athlete. For the purposes of this document body composition assessment includes body weight, surface anthropometry and DXA assessments. For athletes in weight category sports, body composition assessment is integral to assessing appropriateness of the weight class. Rowing Australia recognises that the assessment of body composition is a common part of athlete assessment and needs to be appropriately implemented to safeguard the athlete's health and well-being. Appropriate implementation includes a range of considerations including but not limited to the need for assessment, selection of assessment technique/s, implementation of protocols and dissemination and interpretation of results, plus appropriate athlete education as outlined in the Rowing Australia Body Composition Assessment Guideline [[insert link](#)].

e) Use of language

Positive language must be used when speaking with and about athletes and their bodies. Athletes, coaches and performance support staff should receive education around such language. Rowing Australia believes all bodies deserve to be treated with respect, no matter their size, shape, composition, colour or ability. Before any athlete is asked to change their body (in either size or composition), the CMT, in conjunction with the coach should be consulted and involved in the decision making and communication process.

f) Prevention of disordered eating

Rowing Australia recognises simply participating in a weight category sport poses potential risks. Athletes in weight category sports often experience pressure to reduce body mass and body fat levels for sports performance. Furthermore, the absence of adequate support and sound management practices is often not questioned, in part because weight making has become an integral part of the culture of many weight category sports. Typically, these athletes have an increased risk for poor body image, disordered eating and eating disorders. As such, proactive prevention strategies are advocated via education, support for optimised nutrition

and positive body image in athletes, and appropriate assessment of body composition.

See the [Australian Institute of Sport \(AIS\) and National Eating Disorders Collaboration \(NEDC\) Position Statement on Disordered Eating in High Performance Sport](#).

g) Education

At Rowing Australia we support the education of our coaches, performance support staff, athletes, and athlete support system to assist in early identification and prevention of disordered eating.

h) Body image

Rowing Australia recognises that a positive body image is one of the protective factors that enable an athlete to be more resilient to developing disordered eating or an eating disorder. Appropriate support should be provided to athletes to encourage a positive body image, using activities targeted at groups and individuals. Positive body image in athletes is promoted through education and support for all roles holders at Rowing Australia, not just in our athletes.

7. Other considerations

a) Junior athletes

In view of the negative consequences of inappropriate weight management practices, Rowing Australia promote the general principle that junior athletes (<18 years of age) should not engage in AWL in order to qualify for competition. Instead, young athletes are encouraged to adopt sound nutrition practices that promote good health, support their growth and overall development, and exclude a preoccupation with weight control. Given normal growth patterns, it is natural for a junior athlete to transition through several weight categories until they fully mature. It is recognised, in rare situations, a compelling case in which a junior athlete might need to engage in weight management practices could occur. For example, a talented young athlete who is undergoing a growth phase may exceed the weight division of the Olympic Games for which they have previously qualified several months earlier, rendering them unable to compete in the absence of BODY MASS manipulation. Such scenarios must be assessed, managed and closely monitored on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, support should be provided to the athlete and their parents/guardians by the CMT of sports dietitian, sports doctor and psychologist.

b) Female athletes

Hormonal variations throughout the menstrual cycle can influence several physiological systems relevant to weight management in females, inclusive of body composition, substrate utilization, fluid balance and thermoregulation. Given this, gender should be considered when exploring both chronic and acute weight loss strategies, plus recovery



following weigh-in. As such, it is pertinent to examine either the use of contraception or menstrual cycle status, in conjunction with any potential underlying health issues related to energy availability when working with female athletes.

Rowing Australia recognises the importance of normal menstrual function in our female athletes. Rowing Australia encourages athletes to monitor their menstrual function from a health perspective. Any menstrual irregularities should be investigated with a doctor.

Appendix: scenarios requiring professional expertise

Profession	Scenario
Sports Dietitian	<p>Any athlete who needs to reduce their body mass to make weight, but particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An athlete who is known to have difficulties with making weight or has expressed interest to qualify for a lower weight division • An athlete, identified by another health professional, whose weight making practices are affecting their performance, physical or mental health, or lifestyle • A junior athlete (< 18 y) who is in the exceptional circumstances where weight making might be considered
Psychologist	<p>Any athlete who is identified as having mental or psychological health problems related to weight making or their general involvement in a weight category sport, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An athlete who is not making progress despite a structured plan for weight management • An athlete who demonstrates concerning eating behaviours • An athlete who demonstrates body image concerns • An athlete who experiences large weight gains between competitions • An athlete who expresses interest in competing in a lower weight division where this has been deemed a “borderline” decision following assessment of body composition and discussions with a sports dietitian <p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A junior athlete (<18 y) who is in the exceptional circumstances where weight making might be considered
Sports Doctor	<p>Any athlete who is identified as having medical or health issues related to weight making or their general involvement in a weight category sport, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A youth athlete (<18 y) who is in the exceptional circumstances where weight making might be considered • An athlete who expresses interest in competing in a lower weight division where this has been deemed a “borderline” decision following assessment of body composition and discussions with a sports dietitian • An athlete who is identified by a sports dietitian as needing diagnosis (blood testing) of suspected sub-optimal nutrient status

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any athlete who is identified as having mental or psychological health problems related to weight making or their general involvement in a weight category sport, including<ul style="list-style-type: none">- An athlete who has reoccurring injury and/or illness- An athlete who has suffered complications during the weight making process such as episodes of dizziness/fainting, stomach pains or nausea, full body cramps, changes in blood pressure, cessation of sweat response or altered cognition |
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