

## CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL AS A FREE-TIME MOTOR ACTIVITY

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**Abstract.** *Background.* Motor activities are actions that involve the movement of the body and the use of the locomotor apparatus in order to fulfill the proposed tasks and objectives. These are important activities for the physical development of the individual and the health of the human body in general. Lately, more and more emphasis has been placed on devoting free time to activities of relaxation, entertainment, personal development, socializing, to restore the body after the pressure exerted by work tasks or other daily responsibilities. Motor activities can lead to the recovery of the required body, movement being a tool/means of relaxation, revitalization and optimization of physical condition. For females, involvement in sports activities has been limited by historical and social contexts. Introduced in Romania only three decades ago, women's football represents one of the team sports with multiple benefits, both physically and mentally, a fact for which it can be successfully classified in the category of free-time motor activities.

*Purpose.* The aim of the paper is to highlight the importance of playing football by women as a leisure activity. Thus, the presentation highlights the physiological and psychological benefits of this sport on the female body. These aspects are discussed through the prism of my personal experience as a player in the Representative Football Team of the University of Bucharest.

*Results.* Playing football, among other things, leads to the improvement of physical and mental resistance, resilience, tolerance and collaborative character, contributes to the hormonal balance of the body and the intensification of metabolic processes. At the same time, through the intense and complex demand on the body, women's football presents benefits on the cardio-respiratory system, reducing the incidence of cardiovascular diseases.

*Conclusion.* From my experience as a player of women's football, both in my spare time and within the Representative Football Team of the University of Bucharest, we can conclude that this sport fits very well the physical needs of anyone who wants their free time to be used for health, relaxation and socializing.

**Keywords:** women's football; leisure motor activities, benefits.

### Introduction

Football is a physically demanding team sport and recreational activity that requires both strength and resistance, which is why it has often been considered a male-specific sport.

Encountering much skepticism and hostility in several countries, women's football officially debuted in Scotland in 1892 in Glasgow. About 30 years from this event, in 1921, the Football Association of England decided for banning the practice of football in an organized setting by women. However, the Federation's decision could not prevent women from playing football in their free time, as they valued the benefits of this sport as a recreational activity and socializing opportunity.



In recent years, women's football has grown in popularity, becoming popular for both female and male audiences. This significant increase in popularity can be explained by the high degree of involvement of female players, the intense competitiveness, and the course of game brought to the level of art.

Having been practiced by a large number of players, women's football has demonstrated determination, perseverance and talent. However, men's football continues to overshadow the women's game, possible explanations being the cult that has been created around it, the increased aggressiveness level and substantial investments that has been brought over the years.

In Romania, women's football had a slower evolution compared to other European countries, with the first teams being known around 1990. Only from this date, the practice of women's football began to develop more rapidly, becoming more and more more popular among athletes and supporters.

As a physical leisure activity, playing football is currently among the preferences of the general public. Due to the large number of people who choose to play football for recreational and entertainment purposes, this game has attracted the attention of researchers who have studied its short- and long-term effects. It has been proven that playing football brings a series of physical and mental benefits, being recommended for both men and women.

## **Objectives**

This study aimed to present the benefits that women's football, as a leisure activity, can have on the body of the players, influencing both muscle tone and metabolism, as well as mood and mental state. These aspects are discussed in the paper in relation to my personal experience as a player in the Representative Football Team of the University of Bucharest and in relation to the existing studies in the specialized literature, taking into account both the specifics of the football game and the characteristics of the female body. Thus, several bibliographic sources were selected and analyzed in order to identify the possible correlations between the observed effects of sports in general on physical and mental health and those of the practice of football in free time by the female gender.

## **Purpose**

The aim of the paper is to highlight the importance of playing football by women as a leisure activity. Thus, the presentation highlights the physiological and psychological benefits of this sport on the female body. These aspects are discussed through the lens of my personal experience as a player in the Bucharest University Football Representative Team.

As a player of women's football in the University Team and in my spare time, I understood, both from my own experience and from documenting myself, that this sport, regardless of whether it is practiced at the level of performance or at the level of recreational activity, offers a series of benefits on the body, both physical and mental.

The benefits of football on the female body:

### *1. Physical health benefits*

The main physical benefits of playing women's football include improving muscle tone, maintaining an appropriate body weight, strengthening the bone system and increasing the endurance of the cardiovascular system, with considerable effects on the quality of life.

Playing football can lead to improved endurance and muscle tone, as football is a sport that involves rapid transitions from low-speed activities (walking, standing, light jogging) to high-intensity running and sprinting activities. Although during a game the share of low-speed activities is more than 90%, there are indications that the required oxygen intake is increased, while the heart rate can reach up to 170 beats per minute. In these conditions, the cardio-vascular system is

alternately lightly or intensively requested, which leads to the strengthening of the heart muscle and the increase of inspired oxygen content.

Regarding the influence of football on the bone system, a study aimed at evaluating the bone density of active and retired female football players revealed the positive impact and long-term benefits of football practice on bone mineral structure. This may mean a decrease in the cases of osteoporosis and the risk of fractures faced by a number of women at the age of menopause, as it is known that women have a pronounced risk of developing bone disorders due to the hormonal changes during this period, respectively decrease in estrogen levels.

Thus, the physical benefits of practicing women's football in free time have educational and formative values, being summarized below:

- a) maintains muscle mass/ provides toning and toning to the body;
- b) improves reflexes and increases agility;
- c) increases the resistance of the myocardium and the capacity to transport oxygen in the blood;
- d) strengthens the bone system in the long term;
- e) intensifies metabolic burning and supports weight loss.

## *2. Mental health benefits*

During adolescence, there is an increased incidence of the onset of mental illness, with studies indicating that approximately 14% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 experience a mental illness over the course of a year. Practicing sports can be an effective way of managing the psycho-affective problems they face. At the same time, practicing a sport regularly can increase the body's relaxation level, with direct benefits on cognitive and learning skills.

Specifically, women are more likely than men to develop conditions associated with depression and anxiety. This fact is explained by the tendency of women to let themselves be much more affected by recurring problems, which leads to an increased level of stress. Lack of communication and isolation can contribute to worsening anxiety and depression and ultimately affect a woman's mood or mental health. Women's football is a team sport, which means that during the practice of this sport there is the possibility of communication with other members of the team, and the breaks can be used for socializing and developing friendships. Playing football in your free time is a light activity that combines physical training with moments of relaxation and socializing.

Players thus have the opportunity to share their personal experiences, ask for or give advice and come into contact with different ways of looking at the world. On the other hand, focusing on sports activity lowers stress levels by distancing yourself from daily worries, inducing a feeling of relaxation and euphoria. Reducing the level of stress is also an effect induced by the release of endorphins in the body and with the practice of sports activity, these neurotransmitters being responsible for decreasing mental tension and reducing pain. Cortisol and adrenaline levels also drop drastically, balancing states of anxiety and stress. Thus, in an interview attended by 60 football players, it was proven that the practice of women's football contributes in particular to a better management of difficult situations on a daily basis or at work, to increasing self-confidence and motivation.

In terms of body weight management, women's football contributes favorably to maintaining an appropriate weight. Regular exercise is indicated as a healthy way to reduce the prevalence of obesity, being also correlated with the regulation of health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases or even certain types of cancer. Although this aspect is mostly correlated with the physical benefits of sports on the body, specialized studies have highlighted the correlation between weight and the perception of one's own person or the level of self-esteem. In general, it was found that the prevalence of obesity in women is higher compared to men, with mechanisms specific to the two genders.

Obesity is mostly associated with eating irregularly or simultaneously with other activities, caloric excess, unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle, but also with pregnancy or failure to lose weight after childbirth, hormonal problems or depression. Overweight or obese women have a low level of self-esteem, especially since there is an increasing tendency to criticize the shape or size of a person's body or the so-called "body shaming".

Practicing women's football as a leisure activity can contribute to maintaining an optimal weight both in adolescence and in adulthood, representing a medium-demanding activity that allows the association of physical exercise with socialization. Thus, along with physical toning, the benefits of playing women's football include the development of self-esteem, tolerance and acceptance.

## Conclusion

Among other things, football contributes to the improvement of physical and mental capacities, resilience, tolerance and collaborative character, contributes to the hormonal balance of the body and to the intensification of metabolic processes. At the same time, through the intense and complex demand on the body, women's football presents benefits on the cardio-respiratory system, reducing the incidence of cardiovascular diseases, but also a beneficial effect on the bone system.

From my experience as a female football player, both in my free time and as part of the Bucharest University Representative Football Team, I can say that this sport suits very well the physical and emotional needs of people who want to spend their free time for health, relaxation and socializing.

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