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Internet cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism in athletes

Submission date
31/10/2025

Recruitment status
Not yet recruiting

Registration date
21/11/2025

Overall study status
Ongoing

Last Edited
20/11/2025

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[X] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[_] Results
[_] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Many young athletes set very high standards for themselves. Working hard is part of performing well in sport, but sometimes these high standards become unhelpful when self-worth depends on always meeting them. This pattern is called perfectionism and is linked to anxiety, depression, burnout, compulsive exercise and disordered eating. Up to two-thirds of athletes experience perfectionism, with teenagers and young adults at greatest risk.

Although online cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) programs for perfectionism exist for adults, none are designed for young athletes. This study aims to evaluate an athlete-specific Internet CBT for Perfectionism (ICBT-P) that has been co-designed with young athletes to make it age and sport-relevant.

Who can participate?
Competitive athletes aged 13–21 years who live in Australia or the United Kingdom, train at least three times per week, and report experiencing perfectionism in sport.

What does the study involve?
After online screening and consent (via a secure Qualtrics link), participants will be randomly allocated to one of two groups:
1. ICBT-P program group, who will complete eight self-guided online modules over four weeks (two per week, 30–40 minutes each). Modules include information and activities on managing perfectionism, coping with mistakes, balancing training and rest, and reducing unhelpful checking or avoidance.
2. Waitlist control group, who will complete questionnaires during the same period and then receive full access to the program after the three-month follow-up.

All questionnaires are completed online at three time points: baseline, after four weeks, and three months later. A short weekly perfectionism questionnaire will also be administered to track participant progress.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The program may help reduce perfectionism and improve wellbeing. Risks are minimal but could

include mild emotional discomfort when reflecting on perfectionism or performance pressures. Participants can skip questions, pause, or withdraw at any time without penalty. Those who report distress or high suicide risk during screening will be referred to appropriate mental-health services instead of joining the trial.

Where is the study run from?
The study is coordinated at Curtin University (Perth, Australia) and conducted entirely online.

When is the study starting and how long will it run for?
Planning began in 2025. Participant enrolment is expected from June 2026 to June 2028, with data collection completed by December 2028.

Who is funding the study?
This research is part of a PhD project at Curtin University and is investigator-initiated and funded.

Who is the main contact?
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Additional identifiers

Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)
Nil known

ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT)
Nil known

Protocol serial number
ICBT-Athletes-01-2025

Study information

Scientific Title
Feasibility and acceptability of unguided internet cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism in young competitive athletes: a pilot randomised controlled trial

Acronym
ICBT for Athletes

Study objectives
1. To co-design an athlete-specific version of Internet-delivered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Perfectionism (ICBT-P) in collaboration with young competitive athletes.
2. To evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of the adapted ICBT-P program in reducing clinical perfectionism among young competitive athletes aged 13–21 years.
3. To examine secondary effects of the intervention on anxiety, depression, burnout, disordered eating, and compulsive exercise.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
submitted 30/10/2025, Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Curtin University, Kent Street, Bentley WA 6102, Perth, 6102, Australia; +61 8 9266 4906; hrec@curtin.edu.au), ref: 82973

Study design
Single-centre parallel-group pilot randomized controlled trial with unguided intervention delivery using block randomisation (1:1 allocation) with no masking

Primary study design
Interventional

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Perfectionism and associated psychological difficulties in young competitive athletes, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, burnout, disordered eating, and compulsive exercise.

Interventions
Participants will be randomly allocated to either an intervention or waitlist control group using a random allocation software.

Intervention group: Participants will complete an athlete-specific Internet-delivered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Perfectionism (ICBT-P) program, consisting of two self-guided online modules per week for four weeks (eight modules total). Each module takes approximately 30–40 minutes to complete and covers psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, and behavioural strategies targeting perfectionism in sport (e.g., self-criticism, compulsive exercise). Participants will complete a brief weekly perfectionism questionnaire to monitor progress.

Waitlist control group: Participants will complete the same baseline, post-treatment, and three-month follow-up assessments while waiting to receive the program. They will gain full access to the intervention after the three-month follow-up period.

All activities are completed online using secure Curtin-hosted Qualtrics links and a password-protected program website.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Clinical perfectionism, measured using the Clinical Perfectionism Questionnaire (CPQ; Fairburn et al., 2003) at baseline, weekly during treatment, post-treatment (4 weeks), and three-month follow-up.

Key secondary outcome(s))
1. Perfectionistic strivings – Personal Standards subscale of the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS-PS; Frost et al., 1990) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
2. Perfectionistic concerns – Concern Over Mistakes subscale of the FMPS (Frost et al., 1990) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
3. Anxiety – Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
4. Depression – Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
5. Burnout – Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ; Raedeke & Smith, 2001) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
6. Disordered eating – Eating Disorder-15 (ED-15; Tatham et al., 2015) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
7. Compulsive exercise – Compulsive Exercise Test (CET; Plateau et al., 2014) at baseline, 4 weeks, 3 months.
8. Treatment acceptability and usability – 7-item questionnaire based on the Theoretical Framework of Acceptability (TFA; Sekhon et al., 2017) at 4 weeks.

Completion date
01/02/2029

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Aged 13–21 years.
2. Lives in Australia or the United Kingdom.
3. Trains ≥ 3 times per week in a competitive sporting program (school, state, or national level).
4. Self-reports experiencing perfectionism.
5. Has reliable internet access.
6. Provides informed consent (and parent/guardian consent for those < 18 years).

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer, Other

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
13 years

Upper age limit
21 years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
1. Currently receiving psychological counselling or therapy.
2. Experiencing a high level of suicidal thoughts or feelings as identified by the Columbia Suicide Screening Questionnaire (CSS; Posner et al., 2011). High risk is defined as a score of 16 or above on the suicidal behaviours subscale.
3. Under 13 years or over 21 years of age.
4. Parents do not provide consent for participants under 18 years.
5. Does not train at least three times per week in a competitive sport program.
6. Does not have reliable internet access.
7. Does not live in Australia or United Kingdom.

Date of first enrolment
01/06/2026

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2028

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Australia

Study participating centre
Curtin University
Kent Street, Bentley
Perth
Australia
6102

Sponsor information

Organisation
Curtin University

ROR
https://ror.org/02n415q13

Funder(s)

Funder type
University/education

Funder Name
Curtin University of Technology

Alternative Name(s)
Curtin University, curtinuniversity, Curtin University - Perth, Curtin University, Perth, Australia, Curtin University Australia, Universitas Curtiniana

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Universities (academic only)

Location
Australia

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated and analysed in this study will be stored in a non-publicly available repository on Curtin University's secure Research Drive. Since the study includes participants aged 13–17 years, the data cannot be made publicly available due to ethical and legal restrictions under Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval. All identifiable details will be stored separately, and the research dataset will be fully de-identified before analysis. De-identified, aggregated results (for example, group averages or summary statistics) may be shared on reasonable request to the research team after publication of the main findings, provided this complies with Curtin University and HREC requirements. All data will remain on the Curtin Research Drive until the youngest participant reaches age 25, after which it will be permanently destroyed in line with Curtin University's Research Data Management Policy.

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes