

What are weight categories and how are they used?

Judo, like most martial arts, is a weight controlled sport which means that athletes opponents are chosen depending on their body weight. In order to obtain a competitive advantage over their opponents, athletes often 'cut' weight before competitions so that they fight someone who is of a lighter weight. Weight categories are used at all competitive levels and age groups with over 60% of athletes using rapid weight loss techniques. Many of the techniques used by athletes can be very harmful and cause many severe health complications. Therefore, it is vital that there is more awareness of these harmful procedures athletes are using in order to reduce their body weight for competitions.

Damaging weight loss methods to look out for:

- Body fluid manipulation – limiting water intake whilst maximising sweat production through the use of sweat suits during extreme exercise bouts, and saunas resulting in dehydration
- The use of diet pills, laxatives or vomiting
- Extreme limitation of food intake

THE RISKS

Short term

- Increased feelings of tension
- Decrease in body confidence
- Dehydration
- Decrease in performance

Long Term

- Unhealthy eating habits carried into adulthood such as restricting food intake then binge eating
- Development of severe eating disorders
- Organ failure and death

The prevalence of unhealthy eating habits has become normalized within certain sports which further leads to the development of eating disorders which are carried into adulthood without the athlete realizing. The sooner ED's are discovered, the higher the chances of recovery and less long-lasting negative effects.

The Importance of Monitoring the Use of Weight Categories in Adolescent Judo Players

Emily Rae

An information leaflet to raise awareness of the damaging effects of rapid weight loss in adolescent judo players



60% of judo fighters

start using damaging rapid weight loss methods at the ages of 12-15 in order to fight in a category 10% lower than their normal body weight.

What is influencing athletes to rapid weight cut?

Adolescent judoka's look up to their coaches, parents and elite athletes as role models and often imitate their behaviors. Coaches and parents have been found to encourage younger athletes to follow the trend of 'cutting weight' before competitions in order to gain competitive advantage because it's so commonly used. Athletes are taught from a young age that it is beneficial to use these unhealthy techniques in order to reduce body weight before competitions, with the aim to fight an easier opponent.

Why focus on adolescent athletes?

Athletes as young as 5 years old have been reported to be engaging in rapid weight loss methods. Individuals who pay constant attention to body weight control from a young age develop more signs of disordered eating habits in the future. In judo, younger (cadet) athletes have shown to suffer more from the psychological effects of weight cutting than senior fighters. The lack of experience that younger athletes have makes them more vulnerable to negative effects of these methods.

Our responsibility:

The governments guidance for child protection in Scotland states that individuals working in sport 'will often become significant role models and trusted people in a child's life'

Standard 7 and 8 of 'Standards for Child Well-being and Protection in Sport' states that organizations should be managed well and be accountable for keeping children safe in sport whilst constantly making improvements where necessary