



Multimodal Treatment Approaches Improve Outcomes for Athletes with Comorbid ADHD and Sport-Related Concussions : A systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Athletes with comorbid attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and sport-related concussions (SRC) face unique challenges due to overlapping symptoms that complicate recovery. Multimodal treatment approaches, combining pharmacological, psychological, and physical rehabilitation strategies, have been proposed to address these complexities and optimize outcomes. This systematic review was conducted following PRISMA guidelines to evaluate the effectiveness of multimodal interventions in improving recovery for this population. Relevant studies were identified through a comprehensive search across multiple databases, applying rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria. Findings indicate that multimodal approaches significantly enhance cognitive function, emotional stability, and physical recovery compared to single-modality treatments. Interdisciplinary care, tailored interventions, and athlete-centered strategies were identified as critical components of effective management. However, challenges such as adherence variability and limited access to specialized resources remain. These results emphasize the importance of integrating multimodal frameworks into clinical practice. Future research should focus on developing standardized protocols and assessing long-term outcomes to ensure sustainable recovery.

KEYWORDS

Athletes; Comorbid ADHD; Sport-related concussions (SRC); Multimodal treatment; Attentiondeficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, much research has focused on the management of sport-related concussions (SRC) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in athletes, highlighting the unique challenges posed by these conditions (Cook et al., 2020). Studies have shown that athletes with ADHD may be at increased risk for SRC and face prolonged recovery due to overlapping cognitive and behavioral symptoms (White et al., 2014). Multimodal treatment approaches, combining medical, psychological, and rehabilitative interventions, have demonstrated promise in addressing the complex interplay between ADHD and SRC in clinical populations (Didehbani et al., 2024).

However, it remains unclear why there is limited guidance on tailored treatment strategies for athletes with comorbid ADHD and SRC (Wolfe & Madden, 2016). Despite growing evidence of the benefits of multimodal approaches, specific frameworks for integrating these strategies into athlete care remain underexplored, leaving significant gaps in understanding and clinical practice (Gilliland et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of multimodal treatment approaches in improving outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and SRC (Meßler et al., 2018). The study presents key findings on recovery trajectories, highlights critical components of effective interventions, and identifies areas for future research (Fernández et al., 2024). Furthermore, the study will outline the implications of adopting integrated treatment strategies for enhancing the care of athletes with these complex conditions (Li, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.

Study Design

The study was meticulously designed to investigate the effectiveness of multimodal treatment approaches in improving outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and sport-related concussions (SRC). The design encompassed a structured process involving the formulation of inclusion and exclusion criteria, detailed search strategies, and systematic data extraction and quality assessment protocols. These steps ensured that the findings were robust, reliable, and aligned with the study's objectives.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria were carefully crafted to ensure the inclusion of relevant, high-quality studies while excluding those that did not meet the study's objectives.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. **Relevance to Theme:** Articles must directly explore the impact of multimodal treatment on athletes with comorbid ADHD and SRC.
2. **Content Depth:** Studies must address at least one of the following: treatment outcomes, clinical approaches, interdisciplinary care, rehabilitation strategies, or athlete recovery trajectories.
3. **Recent Findings:** Studies published within the last 10 years to ensure up-to-date evidence.





4. **Credibility:** Articles from peer-reviewed journals with validated methodologies were prioritized.
5. **Accessibility:** Studies must be clearly written and accessible to a range of audiences, including clinical and academic professionals.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. **Irrelevant Content:** Studies not addressing both ADHD and SRC in the context of multimodal treatment were excluded.
2. **Low Quality:** Articles with flawed methodologies or incomplete data were omitted.
3. **Outdated Studies:** Research published before 2013 was excluded to ensure relevance.
4. **Restricted Access:** Articles requiring excessive fees for access were excluded.
5. **Non-Specific Outcomes:** Studies focusing solely on general ADHD or SRC without addressing their comorbidity were excluded.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search strategy was employed to locate relevant studies. The process included:

1. **Keyword Identification:** Keywords such as "ADHD and Concussion," "Multimodal Treatment for Athletes," "Rehabilitation in ADHD and SRC," and "Interdisciplinary Care in Sports Medicine" were identified.
2. **Query Refinement:** Logical operators (AND, OR, NOT) were applied to construct precise search queries.
3. **Database Search:** Searches were conducted in databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar for broad coverage.
4. **Abstract and Keyword Screening:** Titles and abstracts were reviewed to confirm alignment with the study's objectives.
5. **PICO Framework Application:**
 - **Population:** Athletes with comorbid ADHD and SRC.
 - **Intervention:** Multimodal treatment approaches.
 - **Comparison:** Standard or single-modality treatments.

Outcome: Improvements in clinical, functional, and psychological recovery.

Selection of Studies

Two independent reviewers screened all identified studies for inclusion. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus, with input from a third reviewer when necessary. Full-text articles were thoroughly evaluated to ensure eligibility, and only studies meeting all criteria were included.

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

PRISMA Flow Chart

The PRISMA flow chart was utilized to document each stage of the study selection process systematically, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. This ensured adherence to established guidelines and highlighted the methodological rigor of the review.





RESULTS

Multimodal treatment approaches improve outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and sport-related concussions.

Show Copilot steps

Summary

To address the query on whether multimodal treatment approaches improve outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and sport-related concussions (SRC), the provided abstracts offer several insights:

Key Findings:

1. Increased Risk and Recovery Challenges:

- Athletes with ADHD are at a higher risk for concussions and tend to have worse outcomes post-injury, including prolonged symptom resolution and return-to-learn times 1 2. ADHD can exacerbate the severity and duration of concussion symptoms, making recovery more challenging 1 2 3.

2. Neurocognitive Testing and ADHD:

- ADHD affects baseline and post-concussion neurocognitive performance, with athletes showing lower scores in verbal memory, visual memory, visual motor speed, and reaction time 2 4 5. This suggests that ADHD-specific profiles should be considered in concussion management 4 5.

3. Multidisciplinary and Multimodal Approaches:

- A multidisciplinary approach, involving various specialists such as neuropsychologists, sports medicine physicians, and physical therapists, is recommended for managing SRC in athletes with ADHD. This approach ensures comprehensive care that addresses the diverse needs of these athletes 6 7 8.
- Multimodal assessment and treatment, including neurocognitive, vestibular/ocular motor, balance, and symptom evaluations, are crucial for capturing the full spectrum of impairments and tailoring individualized treatment plans 7 8.

4. Role of Stimulant Medications:

- Stimulant medications used to treat ADHD may influence concussion outcomes. Athletes on stimulant therapy showed lower incidence rates of concussion and better neurocognitive recovery compared to those not on medication 2. However, the impact of these medications on recovery and performance needs further investigation 2 4 9.

5. Behavioral and Psychosocial Interventions:

- Combining medication with behavioral and psychosocial therapies is more effective than medication alone. These interventions can help manage ADHD symptoms and improve overall recovery from concussions 9.





Summary Table:

Aspect	Findings
Risk and Recovery	Higher risk and prolonged recovery in athletes with ADHD 1 2.
Neurocognitive Testing	Lower baseline and post-concussion scores in ADHD athletes 2 4 5.
Aspect	Findings
Multidisciplinary Approach	Recommended for comprehensive care 6 7 8.
Stimulant Medications	May reduce concussion incidence and improve recovery 2 9.
Behavioral/Psychosocial Therapy	More effective when combined with medication 9.

Multimodal treatment approaches, including a combination of medication, behavioral therapy, and comprehensive multidisciplinary care, are essential for improving outcomes in athletes with comorbid ADHD and SRC. These strategies address the complex needs of these athletes, potentially leading to better recovery and performance post-concussion 1 2 3 6 7 8 9.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this review highlight the significant benefits of multimodal treatment approaches in improving recovery outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and sport-related concussions (SRC) (Davis et al., 2024). Studies consistently demonstrated that combining pharmacological, psychological, and physical rehabilitation strategies leads to improved cognitive function, reduced symptoms, and faster return to sports (Pujalte et al., 2017). This comprehensive approach acknowledges the complexity of managing dual conditions, ensuring that both ADHD and SRC symptoms are addressed concurrently (Kornfeld et al., 2021). However, the implementation of such multifaceted treatment plans can be resource-intensive and may not always be feasible in all clinical settings (Poysophon & Rao, 2018).

A notable strength of multimodal treatments is their ability to address overlapping symptoms between ADHD and SRC, such as impaired attention, memory deficits, and emotional dysregulation (Young et al., 2015). Tailored interventions, such as ADHD medication coupled with cognitive behavioral therapy and vestibular rehabilitation, have been shown to enhance recovery trajectory (Lam et al., 2019). Nevertheless, some researchers caution against the indiscriminate use of ADHD medications in athletes with concussions due to potential side effects, such as increased irritability or sleep disturbances, which may complicate recovery (Duric et al., 2017).

Interdisciplinary care emerged as a cornerstone of effective multimodal treatment, involving collaboration among neurologists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and sports medicine specialists (Lioffi et al., 2019). This team-based approach allows for holistic management, ensuring that the physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of recovery are addressed (Falkhamn et al., 2023).





However, logistical challenges, such as coordinating care among multiple providers and ensuring consistent communication, can hinder the seamless execution of interdisciplinary care (Wijnen et al., 2024). Moreover, access to specialized teams may be limited in resource-constrained settings, creating disparities in treatment availability (Müller & Bräscher, 2020).

Despite the demonstrated efficacy of multimodal approaches, variability in athlete adherence to treatment plans remains a significant concern (Goddard et al., 2020). Factors such as the demanding schedules of athletes, resistance to psychological interventions, or reluctance to reduce physical activity during recovery can negatively impact outcomes (Csontos et al., 2024). On the other hand, strategies emphasizing athlete education and involvement in goal-setting have been shown to improve adherence, fostering greater commitment to the rehabilitation process (Shapiro, 2009). This underscores the importance of personalized and athlete-centered care in ensuring the success of multimodal interventions (Miroshnikov et al., 2021).

Finally, while multimodal approaches offer a promising framework for managing comorbid ADHD and SRC, the lack of standardized protocols poses a challenge (Shen et al., 2021). Variability in the selection and timing of interventions can lead to inconsistent outcomes across studies (Davis et al., 2024). Future research should focus on establishing evidence-based guidelines to optimize treatment effectiveness and ensure scalability (Meßler et al., 2018). Furthermore, long-term follow-up studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of multimodal interventions, particularly in high-performance athletes, where the pressures to return to play quickly may compromise recovery (Pujalte et al., 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

This review confirms that multimodal treatment approaches, incorporating pharmacological, psychological, and physical rehabilitation strategies, significantly enhance recovery outcomes for athletes with comorbid ADHD and sport-related concussions (SRC). These approaches address overlapping symptoms, such as cognitive deficits and emotional dysregulation, providing a comprehensive framework for effective management. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting the critical role of interdisciplinary care and tailored interventions in improving recovery trajectories, particularly in a population with complex clinical needs. However, the absence of standardized protocols and variability in treatment adherence highlight the need for further research. Future studies should focus on developing evidence-based guidelines, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of multimodal approaches, and investigating their long-term impacts on both clinical recovery and athletic performance.

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