



WEIGHT CONTROL GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH ATHLETES

[WORKING IN COLLABORATION WITH SPORT WALES AND THE HOME NATIONS]



SAFEGUARDING

WEIGHT CONTROL GUIDANCE

The health of the athlete is paramount to British Judo. All stakeholders within the organisation, including athletes, family members, coaches and performance support staff, have a responsibility to support a safe sporting environment.

As a sport where competitors compete in weight categories, British Judo recognises that there may be the need for judoka to manage their body weight at some stages of their performance judo career. However, for youth athletes this should never be to the detriment of long-term health, growth and development. This document aims to provide further clarification on what is appropriate at various stages.



British Judo advocate that judoka on the Performance Pathway should compete in the weight category in which they naturally fall at the time of the weigh-in. Given typical growth patterns, it is normal for a youth athlete to move through multiple weight categories as they continue to mature. It is advised that youth athletes (<18 years old) should not engage in weight cutting in order to qualify for a competition.

If weight management practices are used, these should be implemented responsibly and prioritise the athlete's health. Excessive food & fluid restriction, training, heat stress and other methods to make weight before competition place athletes' health at significant risk and should not be used or encouraged.

Parents, coaches, and athletes should work together in a supportive environment and should be informed of the short* and long** term risks of weight management and cutting techniques, and the importance of fuelling for growth and maturation, health and performance.

WHAT IS WEIGHT MANAGEMENT?

Describes the techniques an athlete may use to maintain a certain weight over a period of several weeks. It typically involves longer term lifestyle strategies such as controlled calorie intake and/or increased physical activity

WHAT IS WEIGHT CUTTING?

Describes the practice of acute weight loss ≤ 7 days prior to a sporting competition involving strategies such as manipulating body water, glycogen stores and gastrointestinal tract contents.

PRE-CADET (12-14 YEARS OLD)

British Judo encourages Pre-Cadet judoka to compete in whichever category they sit in naturally, and encourage judoka to move up weight categories as they grow and mature. This age is typically where the fastest rates of growth occur, therefore judoka may move through multiple weight categories in a relatively short period of time. Judoka should follow general nutrition principles for an active lifestyle that promotes healthy growth and development.



CADET (14-17 YEARS OLD)

British Judo encourages Cadet judoka to compete in the weight category in which they sit naturally as they continue to grow and mature. The focus should be on maintaining a healthy weight to support the athlete's well-being, physical and cognitive development and promote long-term progression. They should be educated on how to follow a high quality, balanced diet fit for their fuelling and recovery needs as a developing youth athlete. Cadet judoka should not be undertaking any excessive food or fluid restriction to compete in a certain weight category.

British Judo acknowledge that during higher level competition, a 5% weight increase following weigh-in is randomly checked as a deterrent for severe weight cutting.

However, evidence shows that young athletes (<18 years of age) undertaking weight management of more than 2% of their natural body weight experience negative consequences on their physical and mental health and their performance.

Cadet age athletes will have increased energy demands from growth and development, as well as a lower mental capability to understand the psychological effects of weight management and the impact it has on an individual's relationship with food and weight. If the athlete is exceeding the 2% threshold due to healthy growth and development, they should consider moving up a weight category.

For exceptional circumstances, (e.g. European Championships or European Youth Olympics where selection is earlier in the calendar year), British Judo can provide support for the athlete to compete in the weight category above (competition place availability depending) or provide the athlete (and parents/guardians) with support from a multi-disciplinary team (consisting of at least a Sport and Exercise Nutrition register (SENr) accredited performance nutritionist and a Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered sport psychologist) to help maintain physical and psychological good health.

Within these exceptional circumstances, any judoka weighing above 5% of the weight category limit will not be supported to compete. Weight loss should be planned, gradual and should not exceed 2% in the last 24-hour period before competition, and this should be implemented with support from a SENr nutritionist and a HCPC registered psychologist.



JUNIOR (17-20 YEARS OLD)

The human body is not fully mature until the early twenties. Therefore, it is likely that Junior athletes may still be naturally moving up weight categories. Junior athletes >18yrs old may use weight management strategies to maintain their competition weight, but the primary focus should be following a high quality, planned diet, and strategies should not be detrimental to an athletes physical or mental health.

Junior athletes should be well-informed on how to implement appropriate weight management practices, and the negative consequences of dangerous practices. Any judoka undertaking weight cutting practices should be restricted to a maximum of 5% of their category weight and should only be undertaken when fully hydrated before any weight cutting process begins. Weight loss should be planned, gradual and should not exceed 2% in the last 24-hour period before competition.



SUMMARY

Adherence to these guidelines should involve collaboration with qualified professionals to deliver evidence-based and age-appropriate education on growth and maturation, nutrition and weight management. Please be advised that the British Judo Association details that it is the responsibility of each judoka to manage their weight in a controlled and safe manner.

At any time where these guidelines are applied, a conversation between athlete, parent and coach is advised so an informed decision which safeguards the health and wellbeing of the athlete can be made.

DO:

- ✓ Compete in your natural weight category
- ✓ Eat balanced meals
- ✓ Stay hydrated
- ✓ Seek advice from professionals if weight management is appropriate

AVOID:

- ✗ Rapid weight loss or “cutting” (especially using saunas, sweat suits, or laxatives)
- ✗ Skipping meals and extreme dieting
- ✗ Restricting fluids and causing dehydration
- ✗ Losing >2% body weight for competition (or >5% for juniors)

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* Short-term risks include (but not limited to): Underperformance, poor relationship with food/disordered eating, illness & injury due to fatigue, absence/loss of a regular menstrual cycle, and cardiac complications and increased risk of concussion (both associated with severe dehydration).

** Long-term risks include (but not limited to): Mental health issues, eating disorders, bone disease, reproductive disorders, impaired growth & development, impaired renal function and overuse injuries.

