

Making weight

All coaches who manage athletes with significant weight loss requirements pre-competition are urged to adhere to safe practices.

Rapid weight loss and its associated dehydration (in a period of less than 3 days), especially when more than 2% bodyweight is lost, has been linked to serious illness and is to be avoided. Headache, irritability, poor concentration, tiredness and unsteadiness can be symptoms of severe dehydration and can precede death from heat stress in the context of overexertion.

Guidelines:

Pre-season: Make a determination as to a minimum weight that athletes are allowed to reach. Judo does not have mandated recommendations, however as an example, wrestlers in the US have a 'minimum weight set at 5% body fat for men and 12-14% for women.' and 'they are only allowed to lose a maximum of 0.9 kg/wk from the start of the pre-season to the date of their competition. For example, a 78 kg male wrestler is assessed as having a % body fat of 7.8%. Therefore, his fat free weight is $78 - (78 \times 7.8\%) = 78 - 6.9 = 71.9$ kg. Minimum weight = $71.91/0.95 = 75.7$ kg. Therefore, this athlete is not allowed to fight in a weight category below 75.7 kg'.

Pre-Competition: Weight loss in this phase should be done slowly and as a general rule be not more than 0.5 kg a week. A dietitian should be consulted in cases requiring greater weight loss and especially if their lean weight is above their competition weight in the 6 weeks pre-competition.

Immediate pre-competition: An athlete should be within 2% (non-dehydrated weight) of his/her competition weight in the 3 days preceding it.

Managers and coaches are advised against encouraging athletes to make weight outside the above recommendations.

Recommendations for urgent medical attention:

Symptomatic athletes (those with headache, irritability, poor concentration, tiredness and/or unsteadiness), especially those who have dehydrated, should be assessed by a medical officer as a matter of urgency.

Be especially vigilant in hot humid environment.

Be aware that thirst is a late symptom of dehydration.

Further reading:

http://www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition/factsheets/body_size_and_shape/weight_making_sports