Conclusion

In recent years, thousands of individuals have turned to sport in order to get into shape, relieve stress and improve their physical health. Such popularity has been actively encouraged by governmental health promotion schemes and the organisation of numerous sporting events, open to athletes of all levels, not just the elite.

Paradoxically, in the pursuit of a healthier lifestyle and peak physical performance, oral health may be compromised. Behavioural, psychological and physiological risk factors predispose athletes to a vast array of undesirable oral consequences. The effects are multiple and affect the athlete on different levels. Constituents of the oral cavity, such as hard dental surfaces, periodontal structures and saliva flow rate, may be adversely affected. Furthermore, dental pain, the systemic spread of oral infection, traumatology and perturbations of dental occlusion affect an athlete’s physical health, his psychological wellbeing and athletic performance.

Many athletes are currently unaware of the intricate relationship between oral health and sport, and the role of the dental practitioner has been overlooked. The dental surgeon is an integral actor of an athlete’s support network, alongside a variety of health professionals including physiotherapists, osteopaths and physicians.

To increase the awareness amongst professionals and athletes, oral health promotion and disease prevention strategies must be reinforced within medical, paramedical and educational sectors. But equally, the dental surgeon must also be able to correlate certain sports medical information to the field of dentistry.

Athletes require a specific monitoring of their oral health. The practitioner must inform and educate and evaluate their patient’s individual fragility as from the first consultation. The key to sustainable oral health is prevention and regular medical supervision, as the slightest interference to good oral health can undo months of sporting preparation.

A well-adapted multidisciplinary treatment plan will avoid such repercussions and help the athlete achieve their desired optimal condition of physical, psychological and social wellbeing.