

COVID-19 - Recommendations

This document must be read in conjunction with the latest advice from the NHS/ HSE etc.

Context

Across the UK & Ireland, significant measures are being put in place to minimise the spread of COVID-19. Most sporting activity, including congregating for training with teammates has either been severely restricted, or stopped.

These restrictions can have a significant impact on the emotional well-being of athletes, as well as the wider public. With this in mind, please find below some recommendations for looking after mental health in these challenging circumstances.

Occupational Deprivation

Within Occupational Therapy practice, there is a well-recognised phenomenon - Occupational Deprivation - which can arise following an individual's enforced withdrawal from their day to day roles and responsibilities. For example, a period of rehabilitation following a sports injury, or the inability to access normal employment due to government sanctioned social distancing programmes. Occupational Deprivation significantly increases an individual's risk of depression and other psychological or mental illness.

Occupational Therapists specialise in treating individuals experiencing, or at risk of, Occupational Deprivation via the provision of a range of structured activity-based interventions. These activity-based interventions support the individual to have access to a range of meaningful occupations (activities) and a structured routine, which may be absent in the circumstances detailed above.

Guidance for Athletes & Clubs

Routine

It can be very tempting, particularly for those individuals who have been prevented from leaving their homes, to stay in bed in the morning, and go to sleep much later than usual. Try to avoid this. Try to stick to as normal a sleep routine as possible (an afternoon nap should suffice).

Healthy Eating

It can also be very tempting to reach for the snacks when bored. It's useful to plan healthy meals throughout the day - ideally, fresh and home cooked! Don't know how to cook? This can be a great time to learn! There are some amazing recipes and video tutorials online!

Regular Exercise

Regular exercise is one of the best ways to look after your mental health. If you are able to go for a walk or a run, try and incorporate this in your daily routine. It is also possible to exercise within the confines of your own home. Even if you don't have access to a home gym, there are numerous resources online, and apps which can support you to have regular access to fitness related activity. Apps such as Nike Training specialise in home based workouts (with or without equipment), and have Yoga & Pilates tutorials. Club S&C teams can also provide individualised training plans for this period.

Rehabilitation & Recovery

In the event an athlete is currently in a rehabilitation process following injury, they should liaise with their physios; surgeons; S&C teams to ascertain the best approach in terms of ongoing rehabilitation.

This period can also be used by athletes to address niggles, or long standing underlying issues that they may not previously have had time for. Liaise directly with club physios and S&C teams to agree upon an individualised training and recovery plan.

Physical Health

In addition to accessing regular exercise and maintaining a healthy diet, its worth limiting the amount of alcohol you are consuming. It's always best to avoid smoking at all times. Get as much access to fresh air as possible. If you have concerns about your physical health, liaise with the club medical staff and follow the most up-to-date NHS/ HSE advice in terms of contacting your GP.

Social Interaction

To minimise the risk of social isolation, it is important to maintain contact with family and friends. If possible, spend time in company with close friends, although this must be in line with the most up-to-date guidance from the Government. Utilise social media, messaging, WhatsApp etc. to keep in touch. FaceTime and Skype are also incredibly useful resources during any periods where there is an enforcement of social distancing.

Mental Wellbeing

Relaxation and mindfulness can be very useful techniques when maintaining your mental health. There are a huge number of resources online, and free trials are available on apps such as Headspace. If you've never tried relaxation or mindfulness, this can be a really good opportunity to give it a go! It's also incredibly effective in helping manage difficulties such as anxiety, and depression.

Activities

It is also important to have regular access to leisure activities. Restrictions on movement can of course provide some challenges, but this may be the opportunity you've always dreamed of to have time to try new things! Some suggestions of leisure activities are listed below, and remember, as part of a balanced routine, there's no need to feel guilty about spending time watching your favourite box sets on Netflix!

Cooking; Arts & Crafts; watching movies and TV programmes; Gaming; Gardening; Walks (subject to government advice); Music (ever wanted to learn how to play the guitar - now is the time!); Reading & Writing are just some examples of simple activities that you can get involved in.

Opportunity for Personal & Professional Development

This could be a great opportunity to explore personal and professional development. That business you always wanted to start, or that book you always wanted to write! Now is the time! This can also be a great time to explore opportunities for training or further education. Training bodies such as the Open University offer a range of distance learning opportunities, including hundreds of free online training modules!

Contact with Clubs & Sporting Organisations

It is of paramount importance that clubs and sporting organisations maintain regular communication with players, coaching staff, backroom staff etc. Regular telephone and email contact can be a useful approach in minimising social isolation. Keep any communication interesting, and fun where possible. The use of WhatsApp groups can be effective in maintaining the strong bonds within clubs and sporting organisations.

Athletes, clubs and sports organisations are in a privileged position, and have a significant platform in the local community. Consider using social media channels to share up to date expert advice from NHS/ HSE, government etc.

Consider sharing information in this document regarding tips for well-being with fans through social media channels etc.

If you are worried about your mental health or that of someone at your club, speak with family or friends or the staff at your club or sporting organisation. It's always recommended to seek expert advice from your GP.