

# Mental Health in Life After Sport

## A QUICK GUIDE TO ENHANCING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH POST-SPORT

The transition to life after sport can have a major impact on your mental health. You may feel lost as you let go of the structure and routine. It's important to work on your resilience and positive psychology as you build a new routine, identity and goals, and learn to thrive in your new environment.

### Feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about the transition? These strategies will help support your immediate mental health:

- Look for ways to build your personal resilience, through support networks, positive psychology or one-on-one counselling sessions.
- Explore different aspects of your identities and uncover what matters to you. Be curious. This will help guide you towards meaningful goals.
- Consider engaging in community or volunteer work that incorporates your interests, skills and professional experiences.
- Acknowledge the path you follow first isn't necessarily the only path you'll take. You can always explore other avenues.
- Think of your life after sport as an adventure; be open to many potential outcomes. There is no pressure to know all the answers right now.

### IMPORTANT!

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, call 000 or the emergency services number in your country.

Here are some key areas to think about.

#### THE POWER OF MENTAL HEALTH

It is common for athletes to share the belief that talking about mental health is a sign of weakness. In fact, it takes considerable strength to safely acknowledge and deal with mental health problems.

Mentally healthy, happy athletes will enjoy their sport and compete for longer. Sound mental health also places athletes in a much better position to manage the transition to life after sport.



### IMPORTANT!

Remember, your mental health is just as important as your physical health!

#### 5 TIPS FOR ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. Think positively.** Research suggests 'positive thinking' can create real value. Instead of asking "what's wrong?" positive psychology asks, "what's right?", a simple but powerful shift.
- 2. Name three good things.** Before going to bed, write about three good things that happened that day, and explain why you think these good things occurred.
- 3. Play.** You have no doubt spent many years working to a strict training and competing schedule, now it's time to schedule in some play. Give yourself permission to have fun.
- 4. Meditation.** Research shows that those who meditate daily display more positive emotions than those that do not. They also built valuable long-term coping and resilience skills.
- 5. Keep exercising.** Your mental health will take a hit when you are no longer training every day. Finding new ways to keep active will help keep the levels of dopamine and serotonin high.

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## KEEPING YOUR EMOTIONAL BACKPACK LIGHT

Athletes often struggle to acknowledge or talk about the emotional issues they experience as they transition out of sport. But ignoring an emotion or problem doesn't make it go away. Instead, it gets stored in your emotional backpack.



This pack is hidden from the world, but over time it will become heavier as you fill it with doubts and challenges post-sport. It is important to empty your backpack and keep it light, to successfully move into the next stage of your life.

## IMPORTANT!

Replace your heavy emotional backpack with a helpful emotional toolkit, full of strategies you can use to support your mental health.

### 5 TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BACKPACK LIGHT

- 1. Connect.** Neurobiological research suggests that we are wired to seek out connection. Look at your friends, family, significant others and community. What can you do to deepen those connections?
- 2. Allow yourself to be vulnerable.** We need to allow ourselves to be seen in order to connect. Don't be afraid to be honest with people about your hopes, fears and dreams.
- 3. Share.** Sharing something from your backpack won't make someone else's backpack heavier. Instead, it can help dissipate feelings of unease and bring a fresh perspective to the problem.
- 4. Allow time to let go.** Transitioning to life after sport is process that will take time. Make peace with your achievements. Trust that the emotions you are feeling are normal and allow yourself to feel them.
- 5. Seek professional support.** Especially if you are struggling with broader mental health issues or unhelpful coping mechanisms. [Contact us](#) to find out more about our personal counselling services.

## NEXT STEPS

Find more helpful resources about athlete mental health on the '[Head Space](#)' section of [our website](#).



Watch [Brene Brown's incredible TED talk](#) on the power of acknowledging your vulnerability.



Check out our [Athlete Transition Checklist](#) for practical transition steps you can take.



Read our [Athlete Transition Fact Sheet](#).

