

An athlete's mental health has just as much impact on performance as their physical condition and at times of great pressure, a healthy mindset can be the deciding factor in reaching peak performance.

Understanding how mental health can be improved and identifying supports available for addressing mental health concerns will have a long-term impact on performance, burnout and athlete satisfaction.



Planning wellbeing for performance

Want to learn more?

Complete Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) training online.

QPR is targeted at audiences with no assumed knowledge of mental health or suicide prevention. The online course covers:

- common myths and misconceptions about suicide
- warning signs of suicide
- how to ask someone whether they are experiencing suicidal ideation
- how to persuade someone to stay alive
- how to refer individuals to appropriate professional help

It's free,
takes one hour and
you could save a
life. Learn more:



Mentally Healthy Approaches to Sport

When playing sport at a competitive or elite level, aspects of physical health and wellness are prioritised and actively monitored and improved.

Athletes often have specific team training requirements, exercise regimes, nutrition plans and rest and recovery strategies. Each element of physical health and its impact on performance is carefully considered and it's likely that athletes readily take ownership of, and pride in, keeping in peak condition. Athletes should view the pursuit of greater mental health and wellbeing in the same way we consciously and actively pursue peak physical health.

An athlete's state of mind has a significant impact on their athletic performance and vice versa. For athletes already in peak physical condition the deciding factor in achieving peak performance is their mental condition. Put simply, better mental health off the court equals better concentration, coping and performance on the court!

Wellbeing Plans

When considering how to best increase aspects of our mental health and prevent the impacts of mental illness, creating a wellbeing plan can be particularly beneficial for athletes. Similar to exercise, training and nutrition plans, the goals, strategies and supports included in your wellbeing plan will look different for every athlete - there is no one right way to pursue better mental health. A wellbeing plan can focus both on improving the aspects of mental health that impact us negatively (recovery focused), as well as deliberately maintaining and increasing positive aspects of our lives that lead to better health outcomes (positive psychology).

How Positive Psychology Impacts Performance

Positive psychology is sometimes called the science of happiness and strength. Working within a positive psychology approach can help athletes to positively frame competitive sport environments and adapt their outlook to increase performance, commitment and concentration. Below are some examples of specific positive psychology skills and how successful athletes utilise these skills to improve wellbeing, mindset and ultimately, performance.

Successful Athletes...

Positive Psychology Skill	Description
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realise that attitude is a choice.• Choose an attitude that is predominately positive.• View their sport as an opportunity to compete against themselves and learn from their successes and failures.• Pursue excellence, not perfection, and realise that they, as well as their coaches, teammates, officials, and others are not perfect.• Maintain balance and perspective between their sport and the rest of their lives.• Respect their sport, other participants, coaches, officials, and themselves.
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are aware of the rewards and benefits that they expect to experience through their sports participation.• Are able to persist through difficult tasks and difficult times, even when these rewards and benefits are not immediately forthcoming.• Realise that many of the benefits come from their participation, not the outcome.
Goals and Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set long-term and short-term goals that are realistic, measurable, and time-oriented.• Are aware of their current performance levels and are able to develop specific, detailed plans for attaining their goals.• Are highly committed to their goals and to carrying out the daily demands of their training programs.
People Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realise that they are part of a larger system that includes their families, friends, teammates, coaches, and others.• When appropriate, communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs to these people and listen to them as well.• Have learned effective skills for dealing with conflict, difficult opponents, and other people when they are negative or oppositional.
Self-Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain their self-confidence during difficult times with realistic, positive self-talk.• Talk to themselves the way they would talk to their own best friend.• Use self-talk to regulate thoughts, feelings and behaviours during competition.

Successful Athletes...

Positive Psychology Skill	Mental Imagery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare themselves for competition by imagining themselves performing well in competition. • Create and use mental images that are detailed, specific, and realistic. • Use imagery during competition to prepare for action and recover from errors and poor performances.
	Dealing Effectively with Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept anxiety as part of sport. • Realise that some degree of anxiety can help them perform well. • Know how to reduce anxiety when it becomes too strong, without losing their intensity.
	Concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what they must pay attention to during each game or sport situation. • Have learned how to maintain focus and resist distractions, whether they come from the environment or from within themselves. • Are able to regain their focus when concentration is lost during competition. • Have learned how to play in the “here-and-now”, without regard for either past or anticipated future events. • Focus on the skill required, not the potential outcome.
	Dealing Effectively with Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept strong emotions such as excitement, anger, and disappointment as part of the sport experience. • Are able to use these emotions to improve, rather than interfere with high level performance.

Create Your Wellbeing Plan

As mentioned, every athlete's wellbeing plan will have different focuses, strategies and supports, dependent on their experience. Elements of a helpful wellbeing plan include aspects of wellbeing related to: Workplace or Professional, Physical, Psychological, Emotional, Spiritual, Relationships.

For each category above, select at least one strategy or activity that you can undertake. You might notice areas of overlap between these categories. It is important to develop a self-care plan that is holistic and individual to you. Athletes should work on progressing their wellbeing plans with the same energy and discipline they follow advice on exercise, diet and physical recovery, the only difference is that the expert creating this plan is YOU!

MY WELLBEING PLAN

For each wellbeing domain, write down what you currently do that maintains or improves your mental health. Try to add one or two other strategies that may work for you in building your mental wellness.

To prepare:

- Fill this out on a good day when you are in a positive and motivated space to think clearly and objectively about how you can support your mental health.
- Include supports that ensure you have a plan for a bad day. We call this Good Day / Bad Day Planning.
- List people who can support you with your strategies or people who might join you to make sure you stay accountable.
- List resources that will help you to fulfill your plan: memberships, apps, online services, phone lines, health professionals etc.
- Give specific measures and timeframes e.g. *I will increase my sleep to eight hours a night, I will practice meditation for ten minutes every morning.*



Physical:

Psychological:

Emotional:

Spiritual:

Relationships:

Professional:

Overall balance:

What might get in the way?

What unhelpful strategies do I need to avoid?

If I implement my plan, how might I feel?