



HEALTH & WELLBEING

NZRP BY THE PLAYERS
NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS ASSOCIATION FOR THE **GAME.**

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Mental fitness

As you transition from your rugby career into the next part of your life, it can be a very exciting time, however it can also be a time of mixed emotions. It is important to understand and appreciate that it is quite natural to have a variety of feelings and thoughts as you work your way into your next phase.

You could experience a sense of grief due to the loss or end of your rugby career. There could be fear about the next steps you take, as this can involve a lot of moving parts. There could be uncertainty about where you are going to live and what you are going to do. There also could be financial, relationship, external or internal pressure on you. The good news is that all of these are able to be worked through. Just as a river keeps flowing, so the challenging times will move on.

If you or those around you think you are experiencing these feelings for a prolonged period without any respite, it could be time to seek professional help. After all, why would you not want to be the best version of yourself? Just remember it is a sign of strength to ask for help.

Many athletes have benefited from working with mental skills coaches in their rugby environment. If possible, try to maintain those connections and keep looking after the top two inches in your post-rugby life.

How do you talk to yourself?

How we talk to ourselves in our head can deeply affect our experiences. Negative words increase the release of a stress hormone called cortisol, which can impact how you deal with stressful situations. The more you hear something the more you believe it. If you keep repeating things in your head, it is the same as saying them out loud. Eventually, you will accept them as the truth.

By using more positive statements in our head, we can allow our brain to increase its problem-solving potential.

The top two inches

You always hear athletes and coaches talking about the top two inches. The head runs the whole body. You can improve your understanding of what life throws at you, how you deal with it and enhance your performance by understanding more about how the brain works. You might want to spend some time each day on your mental wellness. This could involve spending a few minutes reading the Headfirst website www.headfirst.co.nz, meditating, reading material on mental wellness, or getting outside for a run or walk. Look after the top two inches and it will help look after you.

At times in life, we move up and down on the happiness scale. This can be due to external events or factors. Having good mental fitness means we are able to bounce back more quickly. This is also known as resilience.

HAPPINESS SCALE – Where do you sit on the scale?



Exercising and getting outdoors is good for your mental fitness

Top 10 tips for improving your mental fitness

For your mental and physical health, it is important to have a post-rugby routine that includes exercise. Here are 10 ways to maintain your mental fitness, build resilience and flourish.

01

Look after your body

Fuel your body with the best hydration and food. Fresh food is best. Try to limit your consumption of sugary foods, drinks and alcohol.

02

Give your time

Do something nice for someone else. Volunteer your time to help others. This releases feel-good hormones. Even if it is the last thing you feel like doing it will make you feel good about yourself.

03

Be in the moment

Mindfulness involves concentrating your attention on what is happening in the present moment. It is a great way to reduce the feelings of being overwhelmed and super busy, and it allows you to refocus. Try to live in the moment and not worry about other things that are going on. By making your mind concentrate on the task at hand you will enjoy it more and notice more around you. There are plenty of mindfulness apps that can talk you through clearing your mind – e.g. Smiling Minds and Headspace.

04

Practise gratitude

Take time to notice things you are grateful for each day. Using a gratitude journal increases happiness and reduces the likelihood of depression. Thinking about or writing down three things you are grateful for just before you go to sleep can have benefits.

05

Take time out

Finding time to relax is a challenge for most people, so block out time in advance that is protected 'you time'. This could be a few hours of down time, a day off to rest or a holiday. Everyone needs time to recharge the batteries. You wouldn't let your mobile phone run out of battery, so don't let your own battery run out.

06

Do things you enjoy

Find what gives you joy and do more of it. Have fun. Play and move your body and mind. When life gets stressful it is easy to lose your sense of joy, so try to find what makes you happy again – just make sure it is not substance, alcohol or addiction related.

07

Connect with others

The more time we spend connecting with our friends, family, teammates and colleagues, the easier it is to reach out for support. Social connection is really important. A study of MRI scans showed that experiences of loneliness and social isolation trigger the same region of the brain as physical pain.

08

Talk to people you trust

Sharing what's going on in your life, good and bad, with people you trust is a great way to celebrate success, seek support and get things off your chest.

09

Sleep

Sleep is one of the biggest influencers of mental fitness, so getting enough sleep is important. The sleep you get before midnight is highly valuable. Adults (26–64 years old) need 7–9 hours. Young adults (18–25 years old) and teenagers (14–17 years old) need 9–10 hours a night.

10

Keep Learning

Try new things, embrace opportunities to challenge yourself and get outside of your comfort zone.

HEADFIRST
FIT MINDS FOR TOUGH TIMES.

Addiction

Addiction is when a person feels the need to use a certain substance or carry out a specific behaviour with the aim of making themselves feel good or, in some cases, bad. The two different types of addictions are physical and psychological.

Physical – where the body has developed a reliance on a substance and can't function properly without it.

Psychological – where a person thinks and feels they have to use a substance to perform a behaviour.

Addictions can negatively impact a person's life in many ways including affecting relationships, work commitments, finances, health and wellbeing, sleep and other day-to-day responsibilities.

There are many different types of addictions here are just a few:

Social media

Smart phones

Gaming

Gambling

Alcohol

Food

Drugs

Shopping

Prescription medication

Porn

Sex

Common signs of addiction

- Not being able to stop
- Excess consumption e.g. drugs, alcohol
- Being secretive with your use
- Withdrawal symptoms – mood swings, headaches, fatigue
- Sacrificing other commitments so you can continue your addiction
- Doing it at inappropriate times or your world revolving around it
- Becoming dependent on it to function
- Being irritable or agitated when you don't have access to your addiction
- Lying to others
- Physical signs

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these signs it is time to seek help.

What does help look like?

Help can involve talking to your GP or a trained counsellor. They can support you to get any further assistance you may need. If you want to contact someone anonymously, there are a number of helplines you can call.

How to get help

Contact the NZRPA, your local doctor, your local mental health and addiction services or call one of the helplines listed at the end of this section.

Staying up late gaming can have a negative impact on your life

Social media holiday & digital decluttering



How much time do you spend on your social media? Does it impact your life?

Just like it is great to take holidays, it is good idea to give yourself a break from social media every now and then. A social media holiday helps you reprioritise what is important in your life (definitely not a device!). It also allows you to refocus your attention where it should be and reconnect with the people around you.

Ask yourself, could you take a complete social media break for

- A weekend?
- A week?
- A month?

You will find that the longer the break you are able to take the less you will miss it

It can also be useful to do a digital declutter and simplify your digital life by

- unfollowing people on your social media accounts
- unsubscribing from things you never read
- uninstalling apps/software you don't use
- deleting your downloads folder
- turning off non-essential notifications on your phone
- cleaning up your web browser

Reduce screen time

Most people will freely admit they spend too much time on their phones. There are apps such as Quality Time available that can keep track of the amount of time you use on each app and certain phones now have alarms you can set to limit your screen time.

Social media is often a reflection of how people WANT to be perceived

Digital footprint

Your digital footprint is your online identity and it tells people about you. It is the trail of data you create when you are online using Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, dating sites, online shopping or entering competitions. It is everything you do online.

Your digital footprint is permanent

In today's society, people are becoming increasingly defined by our digital reputations. Every online action, whether it is intentional or unintentional, positive or negative, is recorded, and that record is permanent. You might think something has been deleted, but it will still be present somewhere in the online world.

Who contributes to your digital footprint?

Other people can impact your digital footprint by what they are saying about you online, the photos they tag you in and comments they make on your posts.

Who looks at your digital footprint?

Family, employees, coaches, potential partners, banks, rugby organisations, police, media and friends.

GOOGLE EXERCISE: Google your name and see what comes up.

CLEAN-UP EXERCISES: Ask yourself if you would be okay with your grandmother seeing what you post on social media. If not, don't post it. If you have already posted things you think aren't suitable for your grandma to see, remove them.

90% of recruiters google job candidates and 50% rule out executive candidates based on what they find online (Execunet)

Red cards and being safe online

- Don't be a keyboard warrior – if you wouldn't say it to someone's face, why say it online?
- Don't get into online disagreements (for example, Twitter wars). Sometimes it's best to agree to disagree.
- Don't share inappropriate material.
- Don't share intimate images/videos without consent.
- Don't engage in revenge porn. It is illegal and can lead to a jail sentence.
- Don't bully people online. It is illegal and can lead to a jail sentence.

Tip: Never post things when you are angry, emotional or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Your perception of reality can be distorted under these circumstances and you could regret it. You could also lose your job and damage relationships with your family, friends and colleagues. Check if your company has a social media policy – if they do, make sure you read it. If they don't, it doesn't mean you can do what you like online. Your behaviour can still have consequences, so be careful what you post.

STAR MODEL



Online safety strategies

Have your privacy settings on

Always log off devices

Have security locks on your devices

Remove tags on photos or have the 'approve tag' settings on

Change passwords regularly

Don't share passwords

Footprints in the sand wash away,
but your digital footprint never does.

Scams

Did you know?

In 2019 NZ people were scammed out of \$23 million

In 2018 NZ people were scammed out of \$33 million

In 2017, NZ people were scammed out of \$10.1 million

A scam is a dishonest scheme. Scams to be wary of include:

Instagram bots – usually controlled by computers sending friend requests to you. Once you have connected, they usually ask for money or claim they are affiliated to a service that they want you to pay to join. Decline the request or block it.

Fake Facebook accounts – these can use photos from your account to create a new Facebook account that looks like you. They then send friend requests to your group. If this happens, inform Facebook, change your passwords and publish a warning to your friends. Never give away any financial information.

Event ticket scams – only use official ticketing agents or official websites to buy tickets for events.

Ticket resales – be aware that the tickets on these sites are sometimes fake [see [netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz) for more information].

Cold calling scams – scammers contact you by phone and try to get payment or personal information from you. They may say they have a refund for you, or that you have a payment due, or that your credit card has expired – they might even say they're from your bank or from the tax department. Don't give them any information.

Personal computer support scams – scammers might call you to offer to help with slow or infected computers. They often claim to be from familiar companies like Microsoft, Spark, Vodafone or Chorus. Just hang up.

Email phishing scams – scammers try to get personal information like bank accounts numbers and passwords. Don't respond to them. Mark the emails as spam then delete them.

Fake invoice scams – scammers might send a fake invoice for a product or service that was not requested or received. Don't respond to them.

Romance scams – where a person pretends to be in a relationship with someone online in order to get money out of them. Always assume the people you meet online aren't real until you've met them in person.

Receiving unsolicited goods – in some cases, you might be sent goods that you haven't ordered. The company then demands payment and may try to threaten legal action.

Unwanted subscriptions and trials – when people have been signed up to paid subscriptions without their knowledge.

Investment scams – scam operators might promise high returns on your money for little risk. If something sounds too good to be true that's because it usually is.

Webcam blackmail and sextortion – the victim is encouraged to take their clothes off and engage in sexual activities, which are filmed. The scammer then threatens to publish the footage online or send it to family members if they don't pay money. Be smart about how you use technology and don't put yourself in this position in the first place.

Government grants – scammers often say people have been chosen to receive a grant or reward in order to get personal details and then ask for an administration fee. Don't give anyone these details online.



Extra safety tips

Never send money or financial information to people who have approached you online.

Check your phone's location settings – don't share photos or videos that carry your location information. Report any suspicious or abusive behaviour to Netsafe or the police.

You can report scams or fraud online via Netsafe

Netsafe

www.netsafe.org.nz/report

Email: help@netsafe.org.nz

Call toll free: 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723)

Stress

Stress is a common feeling we all experience at times. Knowing what stress looks like for us can make it easier to address before it gets too much.

Common signs of stress

Trouble sleeping, irritability or anger, losing enjoyment from the things you usually enjoy, change in mood, feeling overwhelmed, eating more or less than usual, feeling less positive about yourself or situations, physical symptoms (racing heart, shortness of breath, headaches or churning feelings in the stomach.)

Tips to help you improve your resilience and manage your stress

Know your strengths and limits: Don't over-commit. Learn to say no.

Stay connected: Connect with your family and friends and ask for help.

Share your problems: Talk to people about what is going on in your life.

Reassess your time: Are you managing your time most efficiently?

Take a break and have balance: Make sure you get plenty of rest. Plan and take some time out to do some fun things for yourself. Try meditation **[check out the Smiling Mind app – www.smilingmind.com.au]**.

Set realistic expectations: Are you and those around you setting unrealistic expectations that you can't meet?

Put your stress into perspective: How important is it? Is it life and death or just a flat tyre?

Keep a sense of humour: Laughing releases positive endorphins, which counteract stress hormones.

Reduce your stress: Can you share some of the load, or put a plan in place or delegate things?

Don't turn to alcohol or drugs: Alcohol and illicit drugs will not take your problems away. They are more likely to compound your issues and increase your stress. It is a good idea to use more helpful strategies to cope with situations, like exercise and talking with close friends and family.

If you think you have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs you can get help from your local GP, a helpline or by contacting the **NZRPA** on **0800 PLAYER** or emailing **contact@nzrpa.co.nz**

Eliminate negative thinking: **www.depression.org.nz** has online tools to help manage negative thinking.

Practise gratitude: Focus on what you are grateful for each day. Each night, before you go to bed, write down three things you are grateful for.

Mood changers: Your favourite upbeat music, exercise, laughter or doing things to help other people can change your emotions.

AVOID: Taking on more, nicotine, alcohol, recreational drugs, caffeine and sugar. When you are under stress these things can make your stress worse.

Sleep, eat well, exercise and connect.

If you feel like your stress and symptoms are not resolving, contact your doctor.

"The first step is talking and opening up to someone. It could be a mate, a family member or work colleague. A problem shared is a problem halved. Don't be too proud to ask for help. You would be surprised how many people have been through a similar experience and are keen to help you. For me I struggle being in the public eye, so the best way for me to deal with that is to go hunting, fishing and away on the family farm."

Sam Whitelock



FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

INTRODUCE THESE FIVE SIMPLE STRATEGIES
INTO YOUR LIFE & YOU WILL FEEL THE BENEFITS



DO WHAT YOU CAN,
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,
MOVE YOUR MOOD



REMEMBER THE SIMPLE THINGS
THAT GIVE YOU JOY



TALK & LISTEN,
BE THERE, FEEL CONNECTED



YOUR TIME, YOUR WORDS, YOUR PRESENCE



EMBRACE NEW EXPERIENCES,
SEE OPPORTUNITIES, SURPRISE YOURSELF

Our mental fitness and wellbeing – how we think and feel – are just as important as our physical fitness. Just like our physical fitness, our mental fitness can feel good or bad or anywhere in between at different times. In New Zealand, one in five of us will struggle with some aspect of our mental fitness or wellbeing during our lives, so it is totally normal and okay to feel a bit off sometimes.

However, New Zealanders (including rugby players) are not so good at getting help and support when they might need it. Knowing when we need some additional support and understanding that it is okay to ask for help is critical to ensuring we have happy, healthy and high-performing people in New Zealand. Rugby can be a great support for mental fitness and wellbeing but players can experience extra challenges in situations where they are injured, struggling to perform or are leaving the game. For these reasons, and many others, taking care

of our mental fitness and wellbeing is a huge part of looking after ourselves and being successful as people and as athletes. Managing stress, looking out for others, eating and sleeping well and having positive support people to talk to are key aspects of maintaining our mental fitness.

Headfirst is a website designed specifically to help rugby players, past and present, and the wider rugby community to support their own wellbeing and that of others. The site contains videos from past and present players sharing their own experiences with their mental fitness as well as the struggles and tough times they have faced during their careers. There's also lots of useful information on different topics such as anxiety, depression, stress and how to help a mate. You can check the site out at

www.headfirst.co.nz

FEEL A BIT OFF? WE'RE TALKING ABOUT IT



HEADFIRST

IT'S MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK

1 in 5 Kiwis experience some form of stress, anxiety and depression. The rugby community is no different.

HEADFIRST CAN HELP

Headfirst is designed to help players, coaches, support staff & families in the rugby community to support their own wellbeing and that of others.

headfirst.co.nz



Physical health

In your team environment you will be used to having your own team doctor. However, even while you are playing it is important to have your own GP (General Practitioner) who is independent from your team doctor. Your GP will be able to give you independent advice and provide you with annual check-ups.

Tips

- Get a check-up or health warrant of fitness at least once a year
- Have a full set of blood tests done every year
- If you think something is not right push for more medical exploration or seek a second opinion
- **Check if your immunisations are up to date**

Did you know?

According to new Ministry of Health data, bowel cancer is now the most common cancer in New Zealand – beatbowelcancer.org.nz

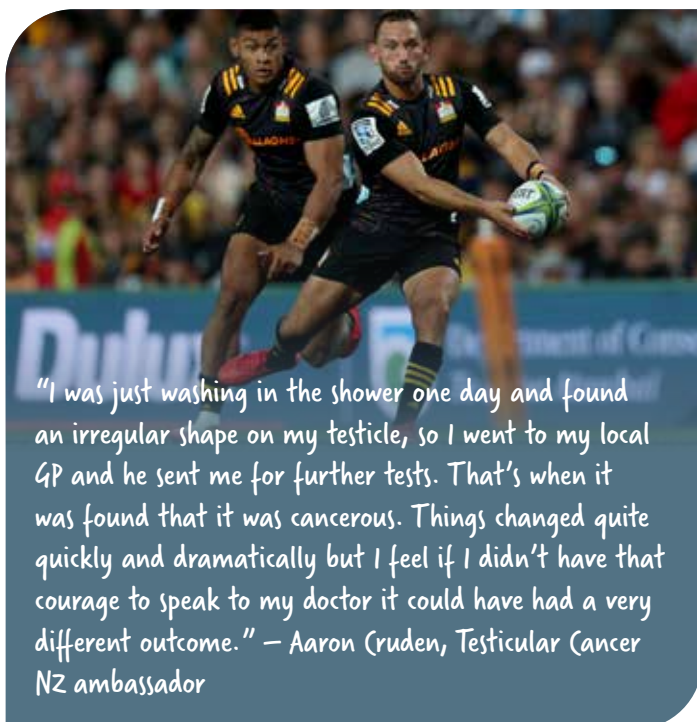
Breast cancer can occur in young people and even in men, so it is important to self-examine for any lumps or changes in the breasts –

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz

Testicular cancer is most common in young men between 15 and 39. Frequently examine yourself for any deformity or lumps in your testicles.

www.testicular.org.nz

If you find anything unusual report it to your doctor.



"I was just washing in the shower one day and found an irregular shape on my testicle, so I went to my local GP and he sent me for further tests. That's when it was found that it was cancerous. Things changed quite quickly and dramatically but I feel if I didn't have that courage to speak to my doctor it could have had a very different outcome." – Aaron Cruden, Testicular Cancer NZ ambassador

Men's health checks

Make the time to visit your GP for an annual check-up even if you don't feel sick. Below are some things you might want to ask your doctor during your check-ups.

Information from menshealthnz.org. Visit this site for additional age group information. Another great site for men's health is www.nz.movember.com

HEALTH CHECK-UP QUESTIONS

In your 20s

Sexual health

Blood pressure

Depression and anxiety

Weight

Lumps in your balls

Moles on your skin

In your 30s

Sexual health and fertility

Blood pressure

Liver health

Diet and exercise

Hair loss

Cholesterol and heart health

Depression and anxiety

Anything unusual in your genitals

Unusual moles or marks on your skin

In your 40s

Now is the time to start asking about tests for prostate cancer and bowel cancer

Family health history

Blood pressure

Liver health

Cholesterol and heart health

Weight

Irregular moles or sun spots on your skin

Depression and anxiety

Vision and hearing

Hormones, energy levels and sex drive

Snoring and breathing difficulties

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

Physical health

Women's health checks

Make the time to visit your GP for an annual check-up even if you don't feel sick. Below are some things you might want to ask your doctor during your check-ups.

Breast checks

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in New Zealand. There is advice on how to do self-checks on www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/breast-awareness. If you find anything that you believe is abnormal or are concerned about anything visit your GP, who will refer you if a free diagnostic mammogram is required.

Cervical screening

A woman's best protection against developing cervical cancer is having regular cervical smear tests. Women in New Zealand can take part in the National Cervical Screening Programme from the time they turn 20 until they turn 70.

Information from www.familyhealthdiary.co.nz

Heart

Although you can't do much about some of the risk factors such as getting older or your ethnicity, there are plenty of measures you can take at any age to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Eye health and vision check

Especially if you are over the age of 40+ or if you have a family history.

Skin health

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world and most skin cancers are preventable so get moles and sun spots checked. If you get them checked once a year, your doctor or specialist will be able to track any possible changes.

Bone health

Osteoporosis is a condition where the honeycomb structure of bone becomes thin and brittle over time. If you are aged 50+ years or have reached menopause, it is important to discuss your bone health with your doctor – if you have any risk factors you may need a bone density test.

Checked your breasts lately?

It's as easy as

T L C



Touch. Touch both breasts.

You're feeling for any lumps or thickening in the breast even up to the collarbone and into the armpits.



Look. Look in a mirror.

Raise your arms above your head. Does this change the appearance of your breasts or nipples?



Check. Check with your doctor.

Check any breast changes with your doctor, even if you've had a mammogram recently.

Go to www.anychanges.co.nz and watch our step-by-step guide.



Breast Cancer Foundation NZ

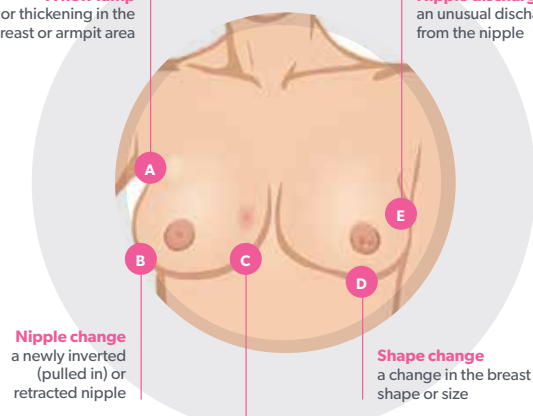
Be Breast Aware



Breast Cancer Foundation NZ

A new lump
or thickening in the breast or armpit area

Nipple discharge
an unusual discharge from the nipple



Nipple change
a newly inverted (pulled in) or retracted nipple

Shape change
a change in the breast shape or size

Skin change
a change in the skin of the breast, areola or nipple, e.g. colour, dimpling, puckering or reddening

If you notice any new or unusual changes, show your doctor



For advice call our breast nurse, freephone **0800 BC NURSE** (0800 226 8773) or visit www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz



Are you aged between 45 and 69? Enrol for free mammograms **0800 270 200** or register online at www.timetoscreen.nz

Physical health

Teeth

Don't forget to visit the dentist and get your teeth checked and cleaned either every six months or once a year. If you have an accident (including on the rugby field) and damage your teeth the cost to fix them could be covered by ACC. [You can make a claim within 12 months of an accident]. Just ask your dentist. However it is a good idea to go to a dentist quickly to get timely care after an accident and to improve your chance of being covered.

Keep moving & keep an eye on what you eat

Some past players say now they have retired they train to eat! For the benefit of your health it is important to be conscious of the fuel you put in your body and the exercise you plan to do.

You have been specifically and intensively training for rugby since you became professional but now circumstances have changed, so what happens? This is simple. You need to adjust your food intake. You need to eat less as you are not burning up the same calories as you were during your professional days unless you are undertaking special events like ultra-marathons or adventure races. With these



Wisdom teeth can cause problems and may need to be removed

sorts of adventures, you will need to adjust your diet accordingly. However, for basic day-to-day living you will need to drop the amount of calories you eat so you don't end up putting on excessive weight. Your body shape will naturally change. This can be welcome for some players as they are no longer training for specific positions e.g props don't need to be as strong as they are no longer scrummaging. One thing past players find is that it is easier to stay fit than to get unfit then try to get fit again. Now is an exciting time for you to try a variety of exercises and sports you might not have been allowed to do because of rugby.

You need to build a sustainable and enjoyable exercise routine. In addition to gym weight sessions, this could include spin classes or cycling, boxing, Crossfit, Tough Mudder challenges, rowing, adventure racing, outdoor trekking, swimming, running, rock climbing ... just whatever takes your interest and keeps you active. You might even want to take up refereeing to stay fit!



Retired players and family gather for some group exercise.



It is important to eat a balanced, healthy diet

Physical health

Stop the spread!

It is important to make sure you wash yourself with soap properly every day to help prevent infections, viruses and the spread of boils.

Instead of shaking hands in a team or work environment, just saying hello or using your eyebrows as an acknowledgement is better to use in order to prevent the spread of germs.

Wash your hands after going to the toilet and before touching food.

Use hand sanitiser regularly– keep some in your gear bag. [Needs to contain 70% alcohol].

If you are sick, stay away from the team or work to stop the spread of germs and infections.

If you have wounds, make sure you keep them clean and covered while you are playing or working.

If you are working out at the gym, be sure to take your own towel and use the sanitiser spray before and after you use the equipment.

If you are still playing, the field can be a grubby place, so after the game make sure you hit the showers even if they are cold!

Use condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

Look after your family and friends and colleagues by preventing the spread.

BE AWARE

Keep an eye on your health and if you notice any changes do not ignore them. Go to your doctor. It is better to be reassured that nothing is wrong than miss the signs and symptoms of something more serious.

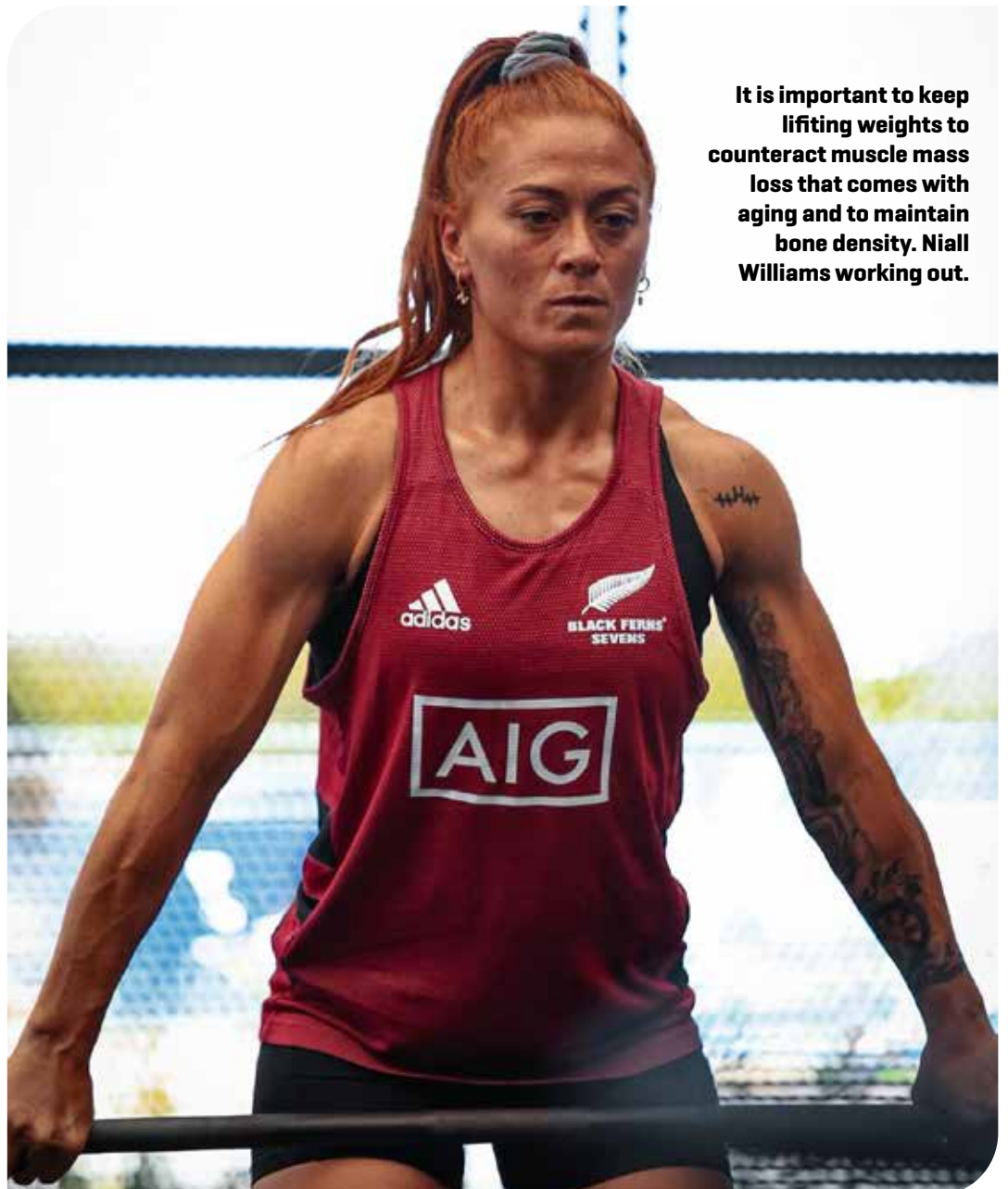
Washing and sanitising your hands correctly helps stop the spread



Keep lifting weights

After the age of 30, particularly in women, your body will lose muscle mass each decade if you don't keep working out. This is also important for maintaining bone density. You don't need to be doing weights to the same intensity as when you were playing but it is important to keep working to a certain level.

It is important to keep lifting weights to counteract muscle mass loss that comes with aging and to maintain bone density. Niall Williams working out.



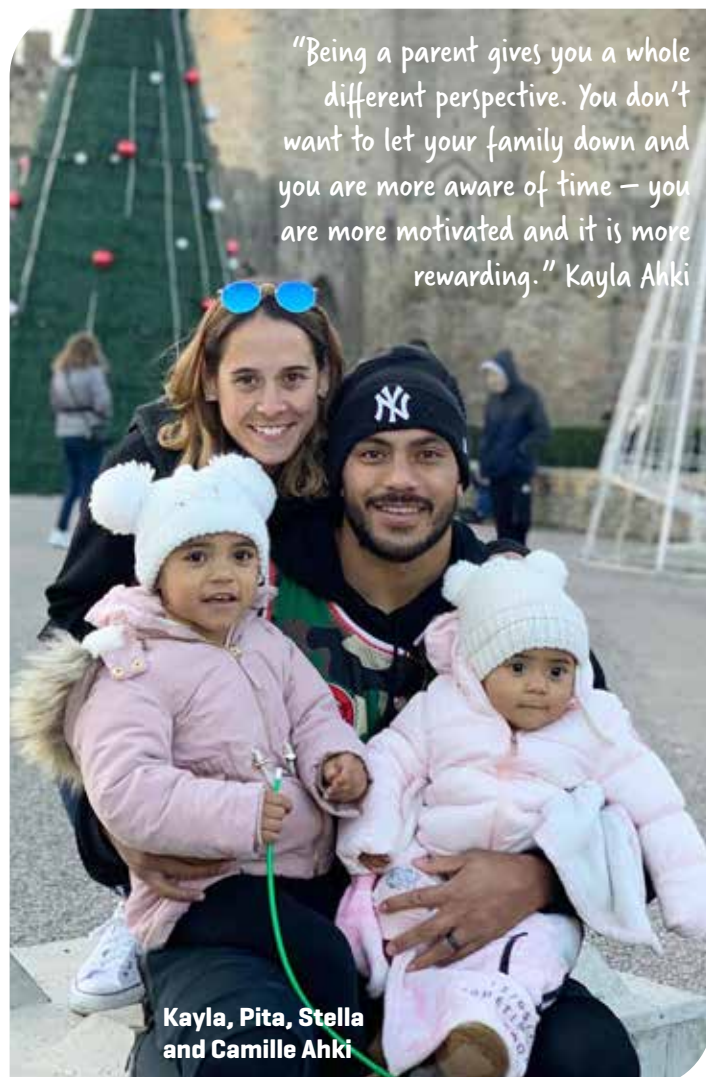
Family planning

There may come a time when you feel you are ready to start a family, this may be after you have finished playing or it may be while you are still a high performance athlete. Below are some things for you and your partner to consider.

Family planning and pregnancy

Planning a family doesn't have to be reserved only for after you've finished playing rugby professionally. If or when a player decides they would like to have a family, open communication and planning will assist with this decision.

If you are a female carrying the baby and working within the New Zealand rugby environment, you should take the time to familiarise yourself with the NZR Pregnancy Policy to understand the obligations and process around pregnancy and your return to play following birth. This is available on the NZRPA website www.nzrpa.co.nz/info-centre under **Women in Rugby**.



"Being a parent gives you a whole different perspective. You don't want to let your family down and you are more aware of time – you are more motivated and it is more rewarding." Kayla Ahki

Kayla, Pita, Stella and Camille Ahki



"It is not really a burden or a barrier to pursuing your dreams if you want to have a child. You shouldn't stop what you're doing – it is not the end of your careers and it shouldn't hinder your aspirations and goals to be a top sportsperson. It just adds more motivation and helps your children in their futures by being a good role model." Kayla Ahki

Professional rugby female maternity policy

If you are a Black Fern or Black Ferns Sevens player there is a special maternity policy to support you prior to giving birth through until you return to play (should you choose to). Part of the policy provides travel and accommodation for a support person to travel with you until the infant is one year old. (See Memorandum of Understanding for latest Black Ferns and Black Fern Sevens Parental Inclusion Policy on the NZRPA website www.nzrpa.co.nz/info-centre).

Kayla's tips

Kayla Ahki got pregnant in September 2016 and had her baby in May 2017. She was back full-time training in August 2017.

- Have supportive team-mates and management
- Get the baby into a good routine very early to help them adapt
- When breastfeeding, you have the relaxin hormone post birth in your body, which lasts up to five months or longer if you're breastfeeding, so high intensity training can cause pain. (Kayla experienced pain around the ankles, which stopped once she finished breastfeeding). This means you can easily overstretch softened muscles
- Plan breastfeeding around playing
- Wear a good sports bra
- When you have time with the kids be 100% present
- Be organised

Family planning

Planning a family while still playing

If you are planning a family while you are playing there are some things to consider, especially if you are playing overseas.

Timing

Where will you be at the time of the birth?

If you're on tour, does your partner have appropriate support for the birth if you don't make it in time or are unable to attend? Can you make a plan so someone live streams the birth for you?

Medical support overseas

If you are playing overseas, do you want English-speaking medical staff present at the birth so you can understand what is happening?

Where will the baby be born?

What country do you want your baby born in? This will affect the passport and nationality of your child and their options when they get older.

Do you want to be present for the birth?

If baby is due during your season, are you able to get time off to attend the birth? You will need to talk to team management about this to ensure your position is covered and your team is well prepared.

How long will it take you to get to the birth if you need to fly there?

Looking after older children

What is the plan for your older children if you are away from home during the birth process?

Post-birth support

If you are playing when your baby is due, what support is there for your partner and the baby?

Do you have family or neighbours who can come and help if there are any what-if scenarios? e.g Emergency caesarians or mother/newborn are unwell.

Other children

If you are overseas what will happen to your other children while the birth occurs? If you are travelling, who will look after them when your partner is in hospital?



Some practical things to think about

Access to you on the field: Does your partner have your team manager's phone number? Is there someone who is able to get in touch with you if they go into labour while you are training?

Have a bag packed: If you are at training and have to fly somewhere or drive to the hospital, having a bag with you that is packed with clothes, some snacks and water can save you valuable time. It could be a long time between meals!

Scan time: If you want to attend the baby's scans, make sure you book them for a rostered day off.

Nursery: It can be a good idea to have the nursery set up well before the due date in case the baby surprises you by arriving early. It will be one less thing to stress about – and it is well documented that cots can be challenging to put up!

Groceries: Make sure there are plenty of groceries and sanitary products in the house.

Petrol: Make sure the car is full of petrol. There is nothing worse than stopping to fill up with petrol while in active labour.

Post-caesarean birth: If the mum has a caesarean section (when the baby is surgically removed) she will be unable to drive to appointments, do shopping, washing or lifting for approximately six weeks. Who will be the support person to help with chores and driving if you are at training?

Post-birth support with siblings: Does your partner need help with other children at home while you train?

"The baby's needs come first, so you have to be more organised and plan a lot more thoroughly. We had to get used to waking up a few times a night then I had to be able to back it up at training the next day. I used to think lack of sleep was a big deal before he was born, now I have to go to bed early and it is just the norm." Kelly Brazier



Boosting fertility

When trying to conceive, there are some important changes you can make to your lifestyle to increase your chances of having a healthy baby.

De-stress – not distress

The most important thing you can do for yourself when trying to conceive is take care of yourself physically and emotionally. Trying for a baby can be stressful, emotional and can feel overwhelming at times.

For women

Smoking – Smoking reduces the number and quality of eggs that develop in the ovaries and may reduce blood flow to the uterus. Miscarriages are more likely in women who smoke. [If you require publicly funded IVF treatment you are required to stop smoking or have not used nicotine patches for at least three months.]

Caffeine – The impact of caffeine is still controversial, but some studies show that even quite small amounts of caffeine can reduce the chance of pregnancy. Try to reduce the amount of tea, coffee, cola and especially energy drinks you consume.

Alcohol – The negative impact of alcohol on foetal development is well known so it is advised not to drink during pregnancy.

Drug – Narcotics can reduce the chances of successful fertility and many are also damaging to unborn babies.

Weight – Being overweight can make getting pregnant more difficult.

Medications – Some medications may interfere with fertility. If this is a concern for you, talk to your doctor or fertility specialist.

Folic Acid – Folic acid can prevent up to 92% of cases of neural tube defects such as spina bifida in babies so women wanting to become pregnant are encouraged to take a supplement containing it. Folic Acid is available from pharmacies without a prescription.



For men

Weight – There is some evidence that men being overweight can lead to reduced sperm quality.

Drugs – Narcotics, tobacco, marijuana and heavy alcohol use can all impair sperm production.

Ill health – Sperm production can also drop for up to three months after the flu or a high fever.

Antioxidants – There is increasing evidence that antioxidants may reduce sperm damage in some men. Antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E and lycopene are present in many foods and in supplements.

Keep your testes cool – Wear boxer shorts not briefs, keep your laptop off your lap and don't have hot baths, saunas, or spas too frequently.

Smoking – There is some evidence to suggest that tobacco may affect sperm production and quality.

Infertility and miscarriages

Infertility is usually defined as not becoming pregnant after one year of trying, but some couples may have concerns much sooner – for example, if the woman is not having regular periods or ovulating. Very broadly, about half of infertility is male-based and about half female-based. – Fertility Associates visit www.fertilitynz.org.nz or www.fertilityassociates.co.nz

Did you know?

Fertility gradually declines in your thirties, particularly after the age of 35.

Latest research shows that up to 25% of couples experience infertility when trying for a baby.

Miscarriage affects one in every four women. As you get older there is an increase in the chances of a miscarriage, particularly over 35.

www.healthnavigator.org.nz

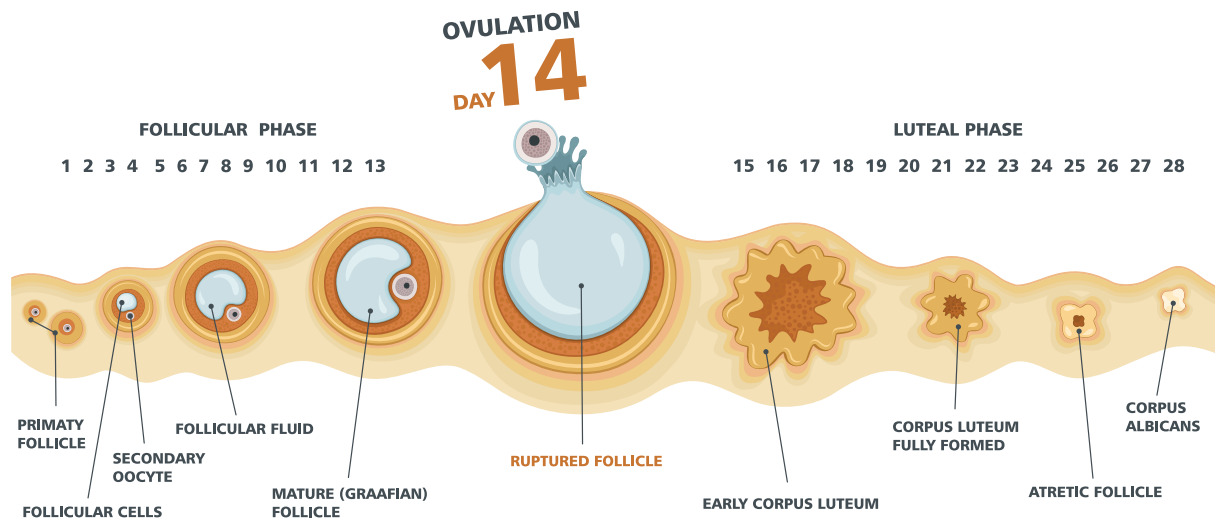
Are you ovulating? What is the quality of your sperm?

If you are male and curious about the quality of your sperm, your GP can do a sperm test to see how strong your swimmers [sperm] are.

If you are a female and want to know if you ovulate [produce eggs] your GP can do a blood test. These are usually offered after 12 months of trying to conceive but timings are shorter with increasing age.

Menstrual cycle (periods)

MENSTRUAL CYCLE



It is important to keep your nutrition and training in balance to ensure you keep getting your period.

Hormones are your body's messengers. While men's hormones are stable day in and day out (they do however change over a lifetime), women's hormones centre on the menstrual cycle. Your period is an ergogenic (performance-enhancing) aid, so be period proud and work with your body for optimum performance.

If you are taking the contraceptive pill, you don't get a period, but you might get a withdrawal bleed, which is different.

Menstrual cycle and performance

Understanding the menstrual cycle and its effects is essential for performance and wellbeing.

Some points to consider include:

- Being aware of how players feel across their cycle will enable them to train wisely and, on flat days, specific nutrition interventions can be used to negate this flatness.
- The regularity of a female's menstrual cycle is an indicator of health, therefore an irregular cycle can be an indicator of an imbalance. Some females enjoy not having a period and so may not recognise this as a problem.
- Some athletes use the oral contraceptive pill (OCP) to alter their cycle, and therefore may not be aware whether their cycle is normal.
- Keep a diary or use an app to assist with your knowledge of how your cycle is impacting you

as an individual. This can then be factored into training programmes.

- Every female's period affects them differently, but some common physiological impacts include headaches, fatigue, fluid retention/weight gain, breast tenderness, abdominal pain and mood changes.
- Females tend to have a wider pelvis, which means more pressure is put on the knees. This can mean that female players are more prone to knee and lower leg injuries. Considering this, strength and conditioning programmes should incorporate the mechanics of jumping.

Menstrual dysfunction is often the first sign that an athlete is in a state of low energy availability, or taking in too few calories for the body to operate properly. That's because when the body doesn't have enough energy to support all its functions, it prioritises the most important ones. As a result, processes like reproduction, which the menstrual cycle is a part of, are suppressed in favour of processes such as cell maintenance. Over time, those missed periods can lead to a drop in systemic oestrogen levels, which can cause thinning bones.

www.bicycling.com/racing/a29651960/ruth-winder-national-championships-win-almost-didn-t-happen/

www.axissportsmedicine.co.nz/blog/archive/an-intro-to-relative-energy-deficiency-in-sport-red-s/

Freezing eggs & sperm

Freezing eggs and sperm

Eggs, embryos, sperm, testicular tissue and ovarian tissue can all be frozen.

The freezing of eggs and sperm is often done prior to cancer treatment to preserve fertility, but some athletes choose to freeze eggs in their prime. Sperm can also be frozen as 'insurance' before a vasectomy in case your circumstances change later in life.

Some female athletes are now choosing to freeze eggs as this gives them more choice over when to start their family. This can alleviate some of the concern about their fertility declining prior to being ready to have children as eggs are usually at their best when the athlete is under the age of 30. This can also be useful if an athlete is planning around events such as the Olympics or a World Cup.

In some cases, freezing eggs and sperm may be funded through the public health system. If you are interested in the process or have concerns about your fertility, speak to your GP or a fertility specialist.

Note: The Human Assisted Reproductive Technology (HART) Act limits the storage of sperm, eggs and embryos to 10 years. If you wish to extend the length of storage, you will need to apply to the ethics committee. Your fertility clinic can help you with this.

www.fertilityassociates.co.nz/fertility-preservation



"When they offered me to freeze my sperm at 19 years old, I wasn't really thinking of kids right then and there, but somewhere in my life I knew it was something I would love. Even with my emotions all over the place because of the diagnosis of having cancer, it was a no-brainer as a safeguard if we were not able to have kids naturally. We have been very lucky not to need it, but I am glad we did it." Aaron Cruden



Menopause

For some women, menopause can kick in early

- About 10% of women experience menopause five years earlier than the average – around the age of 45 instead of 50. Their fertility will also drop five years earlier than the average.
- About 1% of women go through menopause 10 years earlier than average, around the age of 35. Their fertility will drop 10 years earlier than the average.

An anti-Mullerian hormone (AMH) test, if required, is useful to understand if a woman will go into menopause earlier. [Fertility Associates]

Tips

While it might be a long way off for some, here are some tips on menopause from Dr Stacy Sims.

- Do more high-intensity interval training (HIIT) as it helps with blood sugar and insulin control.
- Do more plyometrics work. Plyometrics or plyo is where muscles exert maximum force in short intervals of time with a goal of increasing power.
- Do more heavy lifting to stimulate neural muscular development and maintain muscle integrity.
- Do less long, slow stuff – if this is your go-to you will need to focus on other steps.
- Have a high amount of protein intake post-exercise to stimulate muscle protein synthesis.

Giving back - volunteering

Do you remember your first rugby coach? Chances are this person was a volunteer. Most kids get into sport because a parent, caregiver or teacher has taken on the role of coach so kids can play that sport. As a result, coaching kids' sport is a great way to give back to your family, the game and the community.

Outside of coaching, there are many other ways you can volunteer and give back to your community. While volunteering is a great way to help other people, it's also good for you as research shows that it has strong mental health benefits. Gratitude and volunteering are two key components to good mental health. **[See the sections 'Beyond the playing day' and 'Mental health' for more information].** Volunteering and helping others can even help with depression as, even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing, partaking in acts of service and volunteering releases endorphins that make you feel good.

For you to get extra benefits out of volunteering or giving back to the community, make sure what you're doing is:

Meaningful	Relatable	Connecting
It has some meaning to you emotionally	It is something that can relate to	It provides some sort of connection for you

Coaching and refereeing

Coaching rugby in a community capacity is a great way to give back to the game. All Provincial Unions run Small Blacks and Rugby Smart courses, which are simple, compulsory courses that provide you the information you need to coach rugby from kids' level right up to the All Blacks. These courses focus on safety techniques and injury prevention. Most Provincial Unions also have programmes to foster coaches' pathways.

Signing up to become a referee is another fantastic way of giving back to your local rugby community. If you are interested in refereeing, contact your local Provincial Union Referee Manager or, if you are seriously considering becoming a professional referee, get in touch with Bryce Lawrence, the National Referee Manager at New Zealand Rugby. Visit www.nzrugby.co.nz/get-involved/referee/ for more information or to contact your local Provincial Union about refereeing. Also check out the Careers & Education section of **EXPAND** for more information on education for World Rugby coaching qualifications.

Kurt Baker has started his own healthy meal inspiration Instagram account @krutskitchen. Pictured here is the Spinach & Orzo Salad. The recipe is available at @krutskitchen.

"I have realised the importance of eating well and the link to sports performance. I understand that some kids don't eat that healthy because of different circumstances, including economics and lack of knowledge, which is why I would like to inspire and motivate them with simple, affordable ideas and recipes." Kurt Baker

Giving back - volunteering

Organisations are desperate for volunteers, so there is no shortage of things you can do.

Here are some volunteering ideas:

Mentoring

Big Brother and Big Sister programmes

Health organisations – Breast Cancer Foundation, Heart Foundation, Kidney Kids NZ etc

Environmental groups – maybe check out local pest-trapping groups or community park clean-ups

Hospice volunteer

Hospital volunteer

Opportunity shops – for example, Salvation Army, Hospice, Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross shops

Arts – community art clubs and galleries

Community baking groups – for eg. Bellyful and Good B*tches Baking

Meals on Wheels

Community singing groups

School camps

School breakfast teams

School trips

Coaching sports

Fundraising for community organisations

Play Centre help

Helping clubs

Helping refugees

Visit old people's homes

Cooking at Ronald McDonald Houses

Helping out at the City Mission

Supporting community events

You can always set up your own community event like former All Black Ian Jones, his wife Janine and their volunteers who cook meals every Friday night at Rosmini College in Takapuna. They started the community food kitchen called Eddie's Meals in December 2018. Named after chiropractor Ed Timmings, the community meals provide much valued connection. It encourages people to form friendships and bonds particularly those facing financial struggles, social isolation or just wanting a meal. Ian Jones believes that it doesn't matter why people come. Their reason to come is reason enough. Eddie's Meals provide food, conversation and much valued company.



"My family has been very blessed and we want to share those blessings. We are lucky that we have a wonderful life and it's a pleasure to come and be with whoever walks through the door." Ian Jones



Giving back - volunteering



Being on a board

Being on a school or sporting organisation board is a great way to give back and get involved while learning new skills. To learn more about what is involved and how to carry your role out on a board, visit www.sporttutor.nz. The site runs you through an online tutorial called Governance 101.

Being on the school Board of Trustees is an excellent way to learn about being on boards. For information on how to carry out a role as a Board of Trustee member, visit www.nzsta.org.nz/assets/Governance/Effective-governance-publications-and-resources/How-boards-work.pdf



Players give back by sharing their knowledge with younger players

A break from the game

Some people who are freshly retired from professional rugby need a complete break from the game. This is totally normal and, in many cases, understandable. If you feel like taking a break you might like to do something totally non-rugby related. Any volunteering that you do is a great way to keep connected and build new friendships in a community.

Just be aware that some former professional players find being on the sporting side lines and not being part of the action a bit frustrating, so you might prefer to offer to help coaching the team your kids are playing in or a community team. Chances are you will be asked to help out anyway because of the skills and knowledge you are able to share!

DON'T BE SHY, GET INVOLVED - GIVE BACK!



Ofa Tu'ungafasi and Sonny Bill Williams visit victims of the Christchurch mosque attacks

Helpful numbers & websites

NEED TO TALK? 1737

Free call or text **1737** any time, 24 hours a day. You'll get to talk to (or text with) a trained counsellor. Our service is completely free.

- Are you feeling anxious or just need someone to talk to? Call or text **1737**
- Are you feeling down or a bit overwhelmed? Call or text **1737**
- Do you know someone who is feeling out of sorts or depressed? Let them know they can call or text 1737

Whatever it is, we're here. Free call or text **1737** any time.

www.1737.org.nz Free from a mobile or landline 24 hours, 7 days

Depression helpline: for support, tools and information about depression and anxiety, phone **0800 111 757**, free text **4202** or visit **www.depression.org.nz**

Netsafe: for concerns about text or cyberbullying, phone **0508 638 723** or visit **www.netsafe.org.nz**

Outline: free, confidential telephone counselling and support service for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning **0800 688 5463** [10am–9pm Mon–Fri, 6–8pm Sat–Sun]

Net Addiction NZ: information and advice about video and computer gaming addiction **www.netaddiction.co.nz**

Headfirst: information and advice to help the rugby community support their own wellbeing and that of others. **www.headfirst.co.nz**

Healthline: registered nurses provide high quality health triage and advice, phone **0800 611 116** or visit **www.healthline.govt.nz**

Gambling Helpline NZ: support for those worried about gambling or the gambling of others, phone **0800 654 655**, free text **8006** or visit **www.gamblinghelpline.co.nz**

Quitline: support for people wanting to quit smoking and stay quit, phone **0800 778 778** or visit **www.quit.org.nz**

Alcohol and drug helpline: advice, information and support about drinking or other drug use, phone **0800 787 797** or free text **8681**

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: resources to help achieve good mental health and wellbeing **www.mentalhealth.org.nz**

Le Va: supporting Pasifika families and communities to unleash their full potential **www.leva.co.nz**

Lifeline: nationwide 24-hour, 7 days a week counselling service. Free to call **0800 543 354**

Anxiety Line: provides support and help around understanding anxiety and people's experiences. Free call available 24/7 on **0800 ANXIETY (0800 269 4389)**

Women's Refuge: **0800 REFUGE** or **0800 733 843**

Youthline: free, confidential and non-judgemental youth service. Free to call **0800 376 633** or free text **234**

What's Up: free phone counselling service for young people, operates 7 days a week from 1pm to 11pm. Free online chat is also available from 7pm to 11pm every day. Free to call **0800 WHATSUP (0800 942 8787)**

Aunty Dee: Aunty Dee is a free, confidential wellbeing site that can help you work through your problems. Aunty Dee supports you to list your problems, generate ideas and find solutions. Aunty Dee also has useful tips on life and can connect you to the right support. **www.auntydee.co.nz**

Mentemia app: a mental wellbeing coach in the palm of your hand, Mentemia is available on your phone 24/7. **www.mentemia.com**

0800 HEYBRO: men's support service including managing anger **(0800 439 276)**

ATU MAI

standing together
against violence

www.atumai.nz



www.leva.co.nz



LeVaPasifika

NEED TO TALK?

1737

free call or text
any time for
support from
a trained
counsellor



 **0800 PLAYER**

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NZRugbyPlayersAssoc