

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS KEY INFORMATION

8. MENTAL WELLBEING

We all have mental health, in the same way we all have physical health. For an elite athlete being **MENTALLY** and physically *fit* and healthy is equally important.

Just as working hard on developing and maintaining fitness, strength and conditioning is critical to a successful career in rugby, so too is working hard on maintaining and developing mechanisms to cope with the pressures of elite rugby and life. In fact, you will be a better player if you are mentally fit and healthy.

There are 3 levels of mental wellness:

1. Mental fitness - assists a healthy athlete to handle the stress of professional sport, just like physical fitness assists an athlete to handle the physical stress of a game
2. Compromised mental health - players can present with early symptoms and signs mimicking anxiety, depression or other forms of mental illness. If compromised, players should seek help ASAP, earlier the better.
3. Mental illness - this is the end of the spectrum where symptoms or signs are obvious and daily life is impacted.

You can improve your mental fitness and ability to deal with tough situations through building resilience, mental toughness and self-awareness. Ask your Team Management and PDM on how to go about this.

Compromised mental health may result in mental illness and/or behavioural issues, during and after your playing career.

Signs that a player may need advice or assistance with maintaining mental wellbeing include:

- Feelings of anxiety or stress
- Depression or feeling low
- A negative self-image
- Racing pulse
- Fear of interaction (e.g. with coach, leadership groups)
- Withdrawing from social contact
- Lack of motivation to study, eat well, train, socialise
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Irritable, loss of confidence
- Substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, violence
- Excessive gambling
- Addictive behaviour

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Situations that can lead to these symptoms include:

- Long term injuries
- Recurring injuries
- Non-selection
- Relationship issues, separation/divorce
- Not getting on with the coach(es)
- Difficulties in maintaining a relationship
- Work/study stressors
- Financial or legal pressures
- Loss of someone close to you, grief
- Public criticism, social media

Players should never feel embarrassed about asking for assistance or help. People to go to for help include:

- Friends, family members or a trusted confidante
- The Personal Development Manager
- The Coach or CEO of the Provincial Union
- The Team Doctor
- Your own personal doctor if you would prefer not to discuss the issues with your team doctor
- NZRPA via 0800 Player
- Confidential free independent professional support via InStep on 0800 284 678 (see NZRPA one pager), or other independent support programmes such as Lifeline 0800 543 354

A major issue in players and non-players alike is not seeking help for mental health problems. Early identification and intervention for mental health problems is extremely important, as this can mean less disruption to a player's life and quicker recovery.

Remember - "a problem shared is a problem halved"