

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS KEY INFORMATION

8. MENTAL FITNESS

Mental fitness is very similar to physical fitness. As athletes, you train hard so that you can perform to the best of your ability. The same goes for your mental fitness. Making sure you have the skills and support you need to tackle challenges will help you both in, and outside, of rugby.

There are a range of different elements that relate to our mental fitness/wellbeing:

1. **Mental fitness** - Having a range of strategies and tools you can use to handle the normal pressures of professional sport, just like physical fitness assists an athlete to handle the physical stress of a game.
2. **Tough times** - everyone has times in life where their mental fitness can be affected, and they can experience feelings of stress, sadness, anxiety, anger and grief. The important thing is to identify these changes early and seek help from someone you trust.
3. **Mental Health challenges** - Sometimes our mental fitness can be effected more severely in ways that stop us living life the way we want to, impacting our relationships, how we feel about ourselves and our ability to do our job. Having support during these times is crucial.

Everyone has different ways of dealing with stress, as well as different amounts of stress they can cope with. The good news is that mental fitness is something everyone can grow and develop. www.HeadFirst.co.nz has some great strategies to support you to do this. You can also chat to your PDM on ways to go about this.

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

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

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Getting support for your mental fitness or wellbeing is one of the best things you can do if you are struggling. Just as you would see the doctor or the physio with a physical injury, speaking to someone you trust when you're experiencing a tough time can be a huge help. Some of the people you can go to for help are:

- Friends, family members or a trusted confidante
- The Personal Development Manager
- Confidential free independent professional support via our Employee Assistance Programme - InStep on Ph 0800 284 678 (a 24/7 counselling service for players)
- Support helplines such as 1737
- 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
- The HeadFirst Team at NZ Rugby
- NZRPA via 0800 Player

The earlier you can speak to someone when you're struggling the quicker you'll be able to get back to enjoying life the way you want to. The phrase "a problem shared is a problem halved" is very true in the case of mental fitness and wellbeing.