



SCOTTISH
ROWING

Mental Health Resource Pack

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Disclaimer: This pack has been created based on basic research and is not intended to replace professional mental health advice. It is designed to help you explore ways to cope and support your mental well-being. We do not guarantee that this pack will provide assistance. If you are experiencing significant difficulties, we strongly encourage you to reach out to your GP or a qualified Mental Health Professional for further guidance and support.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Mental Health Resource Pack designed specifically for the Scottish Rowing community. In our journey through life's difficulties, we encounter various challenges that can impact our mental well-being.

As a rower, we are subject to the same spectrum of life experiences as anyone else and as a community, we'll have similar mental health struggles and challenges as others in our sport. We have designed this resource pack to help you develop your understanding of the impact mental health can have on you. We will share tools and tips on how you can better improve your overall mental wellbeing and help you recognize what you might be experiencing or feeling through the use of rowing.

We understand the importance of addressing mental health with the same dedication and resilience we bring to the water and hope there is something here to help you support yourself or someone you know.



ATHLETIC AND PERFORMANCE IDENTITY

When we invest time in a sport, we often end up feeling like it becomes a part of us. We're not just any old person, we're, for example, a rower. In psychological language we call this developing an athletic identity.

An athletic identity can be highly positive in our lives – in particular because it keeps us engaging in sport. Having a strong athletic identity can encourage us to train regularly, to explore outside of our comfort zone, to learn more about a craft and to embrace challenges. It also gives us a sense of belonging – that we're part of a group of people who are also, for example, rowers.

Particularly (but not only) in performance sport, we also see individuals developing a performance identity. This is where you see the way you perform, or the extent to which you achieve in sport, as a representation of who you are as a person. In this sense, you identify not just with doing the sport, but with doing it well – however you define those standards.

A degree of performance identity can be helpful, particularly for athletes who are moving towards competing at an elite level. It helps to commit to the very high demands of a professional sporting lifestyle.

However, for both athletic and performance identities, we often see a correlation between worse mental health and an exclusively athletic (or performance) identity – in other words when you only see yourself as an athlete or performer, and other parts of you either take a back seat for a long time or are underdeveloped. Nourishing multiple identities and knowing when to switch a performance identity on and off are key to reaping the benefits of these powerful drivers while minimising the downsides.

Speaking to a sport/exercise psychologist can help to understand how this shows up for you. You can reach out to sport psychologists in Scotland by emailing the Scottish Sport Psychology Network (scottishsepnetwork@gmail.com)

Author: Matilda Mayne

COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN SPORT

Performance Anxiety: Sometimes referred to as "**choking under pressure**". performance anxiety is an excessive amount of worry and fear of failure in the run-up to and during competitions. It is more than just being nervous. This anxiety can get in the way of an athlete delivering what they know they are capable of.

Social Anxiety: Athletes, especially those in team sports, can face social anxiety, which stems from the fear of judgement, criticism, or rejection by teammates, coaches, or spectators. This anxiety can make athletes feel self-conscious, affecting their confidence, communication, and teamwork.

General Anxiety Disorder: Some athletes and coaches may also experience general anxiety disorder, which is characterised by excessive worry and anxiety in various aspects of life. This condition can negatively impact an athlete's overall well-being, leading to decreased motivation, disrupted sleep patterns, and difficulty concentrating.

Depression: Depression is a mood disorder characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities. Athletes may be particularly susceptible to depression due to factors such as injury, performance setbacks, or the pressures of competition. Depression can significantly impact an athlete's motivation, concentration, and overall well-being.

For more mental health issue A-Z

[Click Here](#)

HOW TO HANDLE ANXIETY BEFORE A RACE

Breathe

The NHS provide a breathing technique, noted below, that can be used to help reduce anxious feelings:

1. Let your breathing flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
2. Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5.
4. Then let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
5. Keep doing this for at least 5 minutes.

We sourced the knowledge of a Performance Psychologist to give some insight onto why this breathing technique helps. This is what they said:

Breathing through your nose will help release nitric oxide, a chemical created by our bodies which increases our blood flow and decreases our blood pressure. This allows our body to relax decreasing the feeling of anxiety.

To immediately calm your nervous system, make your exhale longer than your inhale. Whenever you feel your mind starting to race, come back to this technique anytime: on land or on the water.

Stretch

Stretching can be a good way of relieving muscle tension, elevating mood, and calming the mind. Repeating the same sequence of movement for example the sun salutation in yoga. Stretches like these can help simplify what you need to focus on and centre yourself, especially before a big race.

Visualise

You've likely heard the phrase "**think happy thoughts**" and there's truth to it. Closing your eyes and visualising a place or moment that brings you joy can be a powerful way to shift your mindset. Picture a place you find calming, for example, a beach, envision every detail: the sky, the gentle clouds, the soothing sound of waves lapping against the shore. By immersing yourself in these details, you can momentarily escape the stress and invite more positive, calming thoughts into your mind.

Routine

Having a sequence of things to do can help build a sense of familiarity and control. For example, this could look like knowing in advance what your going to eat, when your going to warm up, what your warm up sequence is, when you will check your boat over. Some people also find planning what will happen after the race regardless of the outcome to be beneficial. Tip: Write down your race day routine.



Reassurance

An anxious brain is constantly over questioning “**What about if this happens? Have you thought about this?**” this is your brain trying to help (even if it doesn’t always know the better way) and it’s actually just doing its job of keeping you safe.

Don’t push the question or thoughts away. Notice when your brain is asking all these questions say thank you for bringing it up, and decide whether it’s something you need to act on or can put to one side for now. Repeat as many times as needed.

Confidence

Often, when we think of confidence, we picture it as a feeling, something like the absence of anxiety. However, we don't always have control over how we feel. It can be more helpful to think of confidence as a behaviour, a way you choose to act.

Ask yourself, “**If I were feeling confident right now, what would I do?**” Then, take that action, regardless of how you feel in the moment. By acting as though you’re confident, you’ll often find that the confidence follows.



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HOW ROWING CAN BOOST YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Taking part in sport or physical activity regularly has been proven to have a positive impact on both our mental and physical health. Some of the many benefits include:

- Helps us to cope with the stresses of daily life more effectively
- Improves our physical health
- Helps us maintain a healthy weight
- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- Helps us meet new people and make friends
- Improves concentration and sleeping patterns
- Gives you a natural energy boost
- Reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel happy

[Sport in Mind. \(2018\). How Sport Helps. \[online\] Available at: https://www.sportinmind.org/how-sport-helps.](https://www.sportinmind.org/how-sport-helps)

Rowing can be an excellent activity to enhance your mental wellbeing. Here are some effective steps you can take to boost your mental health:

Connect with Others

Building strong, positive relationships with others is crucial for your mental wellbeing.

Good relationships can:

- Help you build a sense of belonging and self-worth.
- Provide opportunities to share positive experiences.
- Offer emotional support and allow you to support others in return.

Things to try:

- Participate in team rowing events and regattas, fostering a sense of teamwork.
- Use rowing as a way to connect with others by teaching someone new to row or learning from experienced rowers.

Tips:

- Avoid relying solely on technology or social media to build relationships. Make an effort to meet in person or have meaningful conversations rather than through texting or emailing.

Be Physically Active

Physical activity is not only great for your body but also your mind. Rowing can:

- Raise your self-esteem.
- Help you set and achieve goals.

Things to Try:

- Join a local rowing club and take part in training sessions boosting your over all health of body and mind.

Tips:

- Work within your limits and focus on enjoying yourself. Don't be too serious, remind yourself why you love rowing.

Learn New Skills

Learning new skills can be a great way to boost your mental health by:

- Increasing self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Providing a sense of purpose.
- Helping you connect with others.

Things to Try:

- Take on new responsibilities at your rowing club, such as organising events or mentoring new members.
- Explore other aspects of rowing, such as coxing or coaching.

Tips:

- Focus on activities you enjoy and that you find fulfilling.
- Set achievable goals

Give to Others

Acts of giving and kindness can significantly improve your mental wellbeing by:

- Creating positive feelings and a sense of reward.
- Giving you a sense of purpose and self-worth.
- Helping you connect with other people.

Things to Try:

- Volunteer at your local rowing club to help with events or training sessions.
- Support your rowing teammates by being encouraging and offering help when needed.

Pay Attention to the Present Moment (Mindfulness)

Mindfulness involves paying more attention to the present moment, which can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts and feelings, your body, and your surroundings.

Things to Try:

- Practice mindfulness during rowing by focusing on your technique, the rhythm of your strokes, and the movement of the water. Take time each day to focus on the present moment, whether it's during a row, while stretching, or when engaging in daily tasks.

Tips:

- Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you approach challenges and handle stress.

HELPING OTHERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



Photo Credit: Holly Jones



Tell them you're worried

This might be a good way to open up a conversation. It also shows you care about that person and have time for them – and that they do not have to avoid you.



Offer your time to listen

Listening is an important skill. Ask open questions that start with "how", "what", "where" or "when". This can help people open up. Get [Listening tips from the Samaritans](#)



Offer practical help

Little acts of kindness – like offering to do the shopping or to go to professional appointments with them – can help. Find out what works for them.



Look after yourself

It can be upsetting to hear someone you care about is in distress. Be kind to yourself and take some time to relax or do something you enjoy. Check out [mental wellbeing tips](#).



Reassure them

The first time someone mentions their worries is a big step. It's good to recognise this and reassure them. Let them know you're there to listen when they need to talk.



Carry on as usual

Do what you usually do – behaving differently can make someone feel more isolated. Do not be afraid to offer kind words and a space to talk, whether by phone, messaging or in person.



Do not force it

Do not force someone to talk to you or get help, or go to a GP on their behalf, as it might make them feel uncomfortable. Gently explore their reasons and listen without judgement, as this might help them to work out what to do.

[Read more from NHS](#)

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

This page serves to connect you with valuable information and support for your mental well-being. Whether you're exploring strategies for self-care, seeking professional help, or looking for educational resources, you'll find a curated selection of tools and support options here.

Disclaimer: These resources do not belong in any way to Scottish Rowing.

SAMH Digital self-care plan

Create your personalised self-care plan today and take proactive steps to looking after your mental health and wellbeing.

[More Info](#)

SAMH

Find out more information.

[More Info](#)

Psychology Scotland Network

Anyone can email and explain the support they're looking for. Often the network can refer on to both paid opportunities and pro bono work.

[Email now](#)

Samaritan

If you need to speak to someone Samaritans' has free 1-1 services.

[Contact now](#)

NHS

[Find information and support for your mental health.](#)

[Where to get urgent help for mental health](#)

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Photo Credit: Holly Jones



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