



TACKLE YOUR MIND
A RESOURCE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



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Introduction

The objective of this document is to raise awareness of mental health issues in the Swiss Rugby community for both female and male players.

One in five people in the population experience a mental health disorder during their lifetime. Within one year 7% of the population falls ill for the first time on a repeated case of depression.

Mental health issues are a growing problem in sport as well as society and there is a stigma due to lack of knowledge. This campaign aims to combine awareness and prevention that could save lives.

The onset and prevalence of mental health difficulties in 16-34 years old is higher than in other age groups and they are the least likely group to access support. Depression is the most frequently reported difficulty (27.2%) followed by eating disorders (22.8%), social anxiety (14.7%), generalised anxiety (7.1) and panic disorder (4.5%) (Wood 2017, p.120).

The Swiss Federal Office for statistics shows that men are significantly more at risk to die of suicide than women since 3 out of 4 suicide victims due to mental health issues are men (Bundesamt für Statistik 2017). Men are less likely to seek professional help which may be the result of them not showing their feelings to the outside world because feelings mean loss of control and are associated with weakness (Böhnisch 2013, p.233). Common terms like «You just have to man up» or «Boys don't cry» are counterproductive. Furthermore, depressive symptoms are interpreted as typical «female symptoms» and contradict the male stereotype which is why there is a silent imperative that men should not suffer from them (Möller-Leimkühler 2003, p.3). This could also be another reason why men are less likely to admit to themselves that they need help because admitting their anxieties and problems is not part of the male gender role in western culture. Traditionally, anger, aggressiveness, and hostility are socially accepted as the male code of expressiveness (Möller-Leimkühler 2002, p.4). Death by suicide is a final act of control which is why men use this method to find a self-determined way out of that loss of control.

Studies have shown that playing sport can help with mental health issues (Battaglia et al. p. 596). It is important to acknowledge the positive effects derived from the inner feature of team activities, such as social and motivational opportunities, when sport is employed to increase mental health. Examples of these effects include having opportunities of social interaction, cooperating with others, respecting rules, acquiring other skills suitable for everyday life, sharing leisure experiences, experiencing personal achievement, being part of a winning team, and receiving encouragement and support from fellow team members with the same disorder or struggling with similar challenges.

Overview

Mental health disorder refers to a wide range of mental health conditions – disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior.

Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. A mental health concern becomes a mental health illness when on-going signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.

Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders, addictive behaviors, burnout syndrome, bipolar disorder (manic depressive) and borderline personality disorder.

A mental illness can make you miserable and can cause problems in your daily life. In most cases, symptoms can be managed with a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

Examples of signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries
- Extreme mood changes of high and low
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or sleeping problems
- Detachment from reality, paranoia, or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and people
- Problems with alcohol or drugs
- Major changes in eating habits
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostilities, or violence
- Suicidal thinking

Suicidal thoughts and behavior are common with some mental illnesses. If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide get help straight away:

- Call your local emergency number
- Call a mental health specialist
- Call a suicide hotline number
- Seek help from your family doctor
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one

Suicidal thinking does not get better on its own – Please get help!

The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health

COVID-19 can be scary and can affect our mental health. While it is important to stay informed, there are many things we can do to support and manage our well-being during such times:

- Most of us will be spending a lot of time at home and many of our regular activities will no longer be available to us
- It will help to try and see it as a different period in your life and not necessarily a bad one.
- It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual
- Keep in touch with other people regularly on social media, by email or on the phone, as these are ways of still being close to the people who matter to you
- Create a new daily plan that prioritizes looking after yourself
- Try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation practices, or finding new knowledge on the internet
- Rumor and speculation can fuel anxiety
- Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control

- There is extensive news coverage about the pandemic, so if you find that the information is causing you stress, it is important to find a balance between staying informed and being overloaded.
- It is best that you do not avoid all news and that you keep informing and educating yourself but limit your news intake if it is bothering you.

PREVENTION

It is important to take care of yourself and get the most out of life. The following are practical steps to look after your mental health. Making simple changes to how you live does not need to cost a fortune or take up loads of time:

1. Talk About Your Feelings

Talking about your feelings can help to stay in good mental health. It is part of taking charge of your well-being and doing what you can do to stay healthy.

Talking can be a way to cope with a problem you have been carrying around in your head for a while. Just being listened to can help you feel supported and less alone. If you open up, it might encourage others to do the same.

It is not always easy to describe how you are feeling. If you cannot think of one word, use many. What does it feel like inside your head? What does it make you feel like doing?

You do not need to sit down with your loved ones for a big conversation about your well-being. Many people feel more comfortable when these conversations develop naturally such as doing something together.

If it feels awkward at first, give it time. Make talking about your feelings something that you do regularly.

Most importantly: it's good to talk.

2. Keep Active

Experts have found that exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem, help you concentrate, as well as sleep and feel better.

Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy. Exercise does not just mean playing rugby or going to the gym. Walks in the park, gardening, or housework can also keep you active. To boost your mental health, you should try and aim to do about thirty minutes of exercise at least five times a week.

3. Eat Well

Your brain needs a mix of nutrients to stay healthy and function well. A diet that is good for your health is also good for your mental health.

A healthy diet includes:

- Various different types of fruit and vegetables
- Wholegrain cereals and bread
- Nuts and seeds
- Dairy products
- Oily fish
- Drinking plenty of water

4. Drink Sensibly

We often drink alcohol to change our mood. Some people drink to deal with fear or loneliness, but the effect is only temporary.

When alcohol wears off you feel worse because of the way it has affected your brain and the rest of your body. Drinking alcohol is not a solution to manage difficult feelings.

Occasional light drinking of alcohol can be ok in moderation. Stay within the recommended weekly alcohol limits (14 units per week for men and women).

Many people also smoke or use drugs or other substances to change how they feel. However, the effects are short lived. Like alcohol, nicotine and drugs do not deal with the causes of difficult feelings. They do not solve problems but create them.

5. Keep in Touch

There is nothing better than catching up with someone face to face. You can also give them a call, drop them a note or chat to them online. Keep the lines of communication open because it is good for you.

It is worth working at relationships that make you feel loved and valued. Just chilling out with friends can relax you by having a laugh and feeling good.

6. Ask for Help

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things do not go to plan.

If things are getting too much for you and you feel you cannot cope it is important that you ask for help. Your family and friends may be able to offer practical help or a listening ear. Your family doctor may be able to refer you to a counsellor. You should consider getting help if your feelings...

- ... stop you getting on in life
- ... have a big impact on the people you live or work with
- ... affect your mood over several weeks

There are also **helplines** to contact should you encounter a critical situation regarding your state of mental health.

- [Suicide Hotline/Dargebotene Hand](#): 143
- [Pro Mente Sana Beratung](#): 0848 800 858

- Every canton in Switzerland also has its own free mental health helplines

7. Take a Break

A change of scene or a change of space is good for your mental health. It could be a half-hour lunch break at work or a weekend exploring something or someplace new.

A few minutes can be enough to de-stress so give yourself some me-time. Listen to your body. If you are very tired give yourself time to sleep. Without good sleep our mental health suffers, and our concentration diminishes.

8. Do something you're good at

Enjoying yourself can help beat stress. Engaging in an activity you enjoy probably means you are good at it and achieving something that boosts your self-confidence.

An afternoon or evening on the rugby field gets you active and gives you the chance to meet your friends as well as make new acquaintances.

9. Accept who you are

We are all different. It is much healthier to accept you are unique than to wish you were more like someone else. Feeling good about yourself boosts your confidence to learn new skills, visit new places, and make new friends. Good self-esteem helps you cope when life takes a difficult turn.

10. Care for others

Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you close together. Helping can make us feel needed and valued, and that boosts our self-esteem.

SUMMARY

There is no sure way to prevent mental illness. However, if you have a mental illness, taking steps to control stress, to increase your resilience, and to boost low self-esteem may help keep your symptoms under control.

- Pay attention to the warning signs
- Get routine medical care
- Get help when you need it
- Take good care of yourself

Recommended Resources

New Zealand RFU – Headfirst – <http://www.headfirst.co.nz/>

Mental Health Foundation (English/German) – <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

Mind (UK) (English/German) – <http://www.mind.org.uk>

World Rugby Mindset – A Mental Health Resource: [LINK](#)

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Mental Health Foundation (UK/Germany)