



MENTAL HEALTH IN ELITE TENNIS PLAYERS

Emma Welsh

What is MENTAL HEALTH?



Just like physical health, an individual's mental health can change throughout the course of their life and have a major impact on capabilities daily. This leaflet will provide support and guidance for elite tennis players to identify, manage and prevent the development of severe mental health problems throughout their career.



Key Definition:

State of mental wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well and contribute to their own community.

Most Common:

- Depression
- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Post traumatic stress disorder

"Tennis is mostly mental, you win or lose the match before you even go out there
- Venus Williams

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Lifetime prevalence of mental health problems in elite athletes is 51.7%

Key signs in elite level athletes that indicate a mental health problem:

- Sleep/appetite changes
- Mood changes
- Withdrawal
- Increased sensitivity to emotions
- Apathy
- Overuse of alcohol
- Drug abuse
- Excessive worrying or fear
- Inability to control stress

REMEMBER:

Mental health acts on a continuum. Athletes can be mentally healthy whilst having a mental health disorder or experiencing symptoms.

Individuals are capable of recovering and having periods of optimum health. Individuals without a mental disorder may experience times of poor mental health.



KEY STRESSORS

Uniqueness of the Sport

Tennis is a unique sport which requires athletes to continuously adapt to different conditions whilst on the professional circuit. These are mostly environmental, including the weather and playing surfaces.

Sports like football and rugby allow athletes to communicate and interact with coaches and supporting personnel, however tennis players are by themselves, on court for hours with no input.

"I really think a champion is defined not by their wins but by how they can recover when they fail" -
Serena Williams



Physical and Mental Fatigue

Tennis requires athletes to travel weekly, experiencing different time zones and changes in cultures. This results in no structure and a nomadic lifestyle - a way of life where athletes do not continually live in the same place but move around cyclically. This comes with financial strains and expectation, if athletes aren't winning they cannot afford to travel to countries to compete and pay for the travel of coaches and supporting personnel.

Financial Strain

If athletes aren't winning on the professional circuit, they do not make a profit in order to countries to compete and pay for the travel of coaches and their supporting personnel.

Shockingly, only 1.8% of males and 3.1% of females have made a profit whilst competing on the tour.

"Tennis is a fine line between inspiration and tiredness"
Virginia Wade

IDENTIFICATION, MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

of mental health problems



1

Identification

Early identification of mental health problems allows for athletes to be able to access specific interventions suitable to their emotions and is an important tool for recovery.

Mood, cognition and emotions are harder to observe as they don't take physical shape so it is important for specialised and experienced personnel to work with athletes.



2

Management

Current culture recognises mental health to be as important as physical health. Employing a clinician who has expertise in elite athlete mental health specifically is just as important as employing a physiotherapist.

Important for athletes to understand the specific risk factors and the severity of the onset of these. Therefore being able to recognise mental health problems is advantageous.



3

Prevention

Understanding and being able to recognise mental health literacy is a key component in preventing any severe mental health problems occurring.

Reducing stigma around mental health and speaking out as an elite athlete is key in the whole scale prevention in athletes. As well as this, promoting the importance of early help seeking is key for athletes to get the correct and beneficial help and guidance required.

Mental health screenings throughout the year help to maintain an understanding of an athletes own health and allow for any early interventions to be developed.

*Reaching out is a
challenging yet
rewarding experience.
do it for you.*



Mind

Infoline: 0300 123 3393

Provides an information and signposting services. Open 9am - 6pm, Monday - Friday (except for bank holidays).

Can ask for help and support on:

- Mental health problems
- Where to get help near you
- Treatment options
- Advocacy



Samaritans

Contact Number: 116 123

'If you need someone to talk to, we listen. We won't judge or tell you what to do'. Phone lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and are free to call.



Shout

Text Shout to 85258

Text line to gain support and talk about urgent issues including:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Abuse or assault
- Self harm
- Bulling
- Relationship challenges