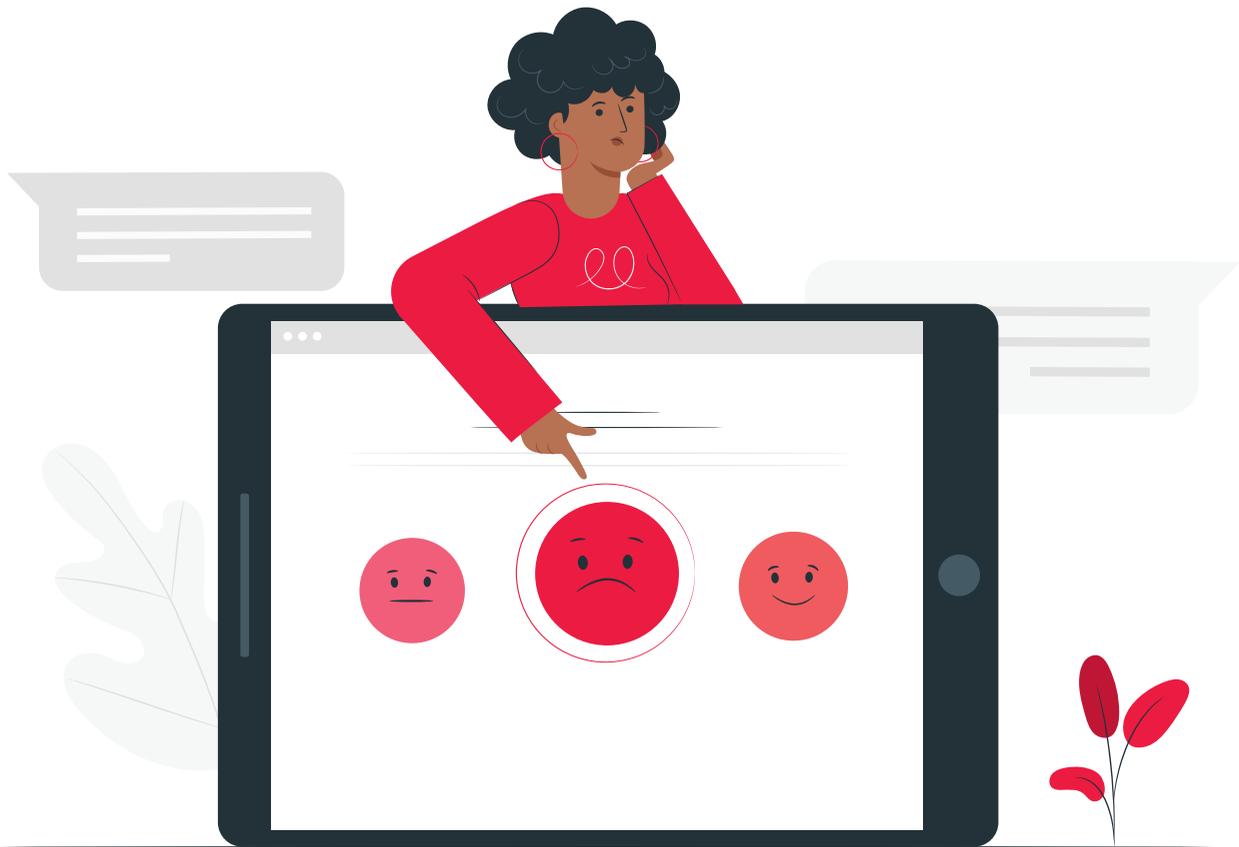




# Understanding Mental Health



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## Understanding mental health

To help you understand mental health and how to keep track of it, we'll start by defining a few terms and showing you some helpful models to help make sense of it. We have all heard about mental health and mental illness but what do they actually mean?

Mental health, as defined by the World Health Organization, is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. A helpful way to think about it is that everyone has mental health; it's your overall level of well being and functioning, and it goes up and down. When you're mentally healthy, you're likely able to handle training and the daily stressors of life (e.g., planning meals, attending classes, positively functioning at your job). On the other hand, when you're mentally unhealthy, you're unable or struggling to cope. Importantly, with coping strategies and the right support, it is possible to maintain high levels of mental health, even when diagnosed with a mental illness. Mental illness is characterized by changes in an individual's thoughts (e.g., self-doubt),

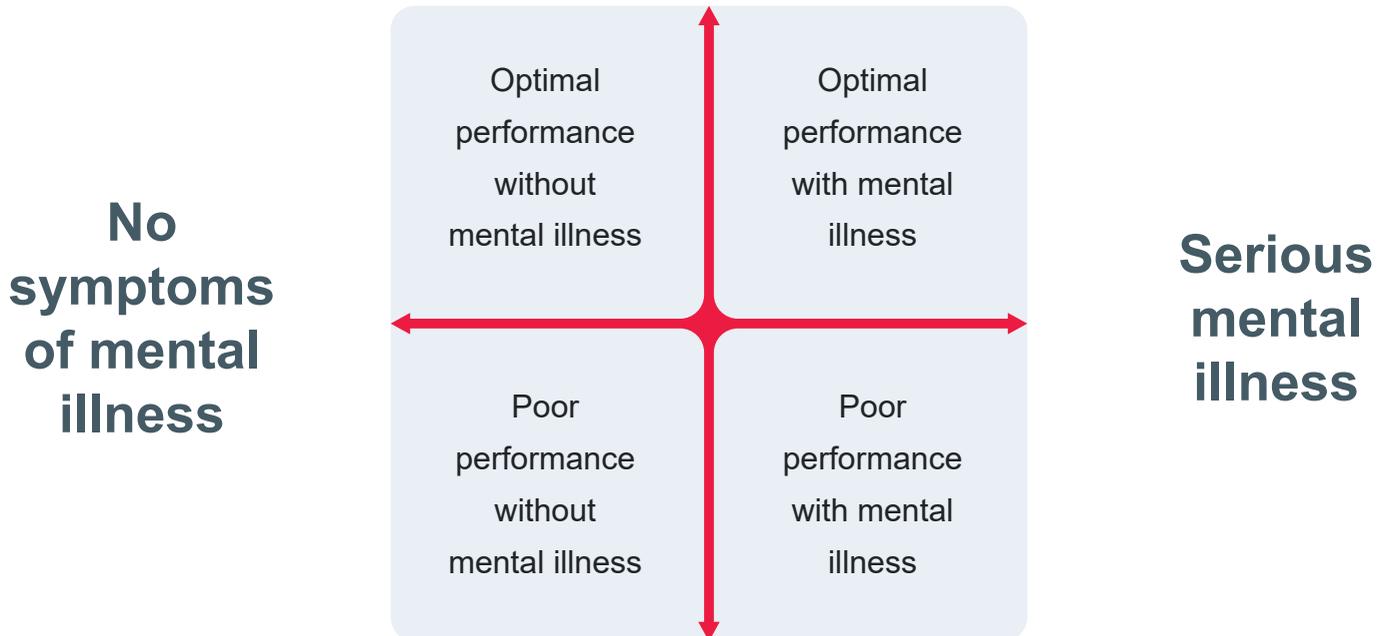
feelings (e.g., emotions, physical sensations) and behaviours (e.g., interactions with others, sleep patterns), leading to significant distress and impaired functioning in personal and professional activities. Whether or not we experience mental illness depends on a number of biological (e.g., genetics), psychological (e.g., personality), and social (e.g., presence/absence of healthy relationships) factors, so unlike mental health, not everyone experiences symptoms of mental illness. Similar to mental health however, symptoms of mental illness can be experienced at different levels of severity, ranging from symptoms that challenge our ability to function, but that we are able to overcome, to severe symptoms that prevent us from functioning day to day, working and training. Experiencing significant changes in your thoughts, feelings and / or behaviours for a period of two weeks or more is usually a sign that it's time to ask for help, but there's also no need to wait. If something feels off, there's no harm in talking to someone.

It is very important for athletes and their support staff to understand that you can have mental illness and still perform well, you just need to manage the illness properly, just like you would a physical illness or injury.

That is why it's imperative for athletes (and really anyone) to track, or at least be aware of, their general mental health. The graph below shows how mental illness, mental health and performance can interact. It's important to note that though the top left is 'ideal', virtually everyone experiences changes in their mental health and one in five Canadians a year experience mental illness. In other words, it's normal to move between the squares and up and down the continuum.



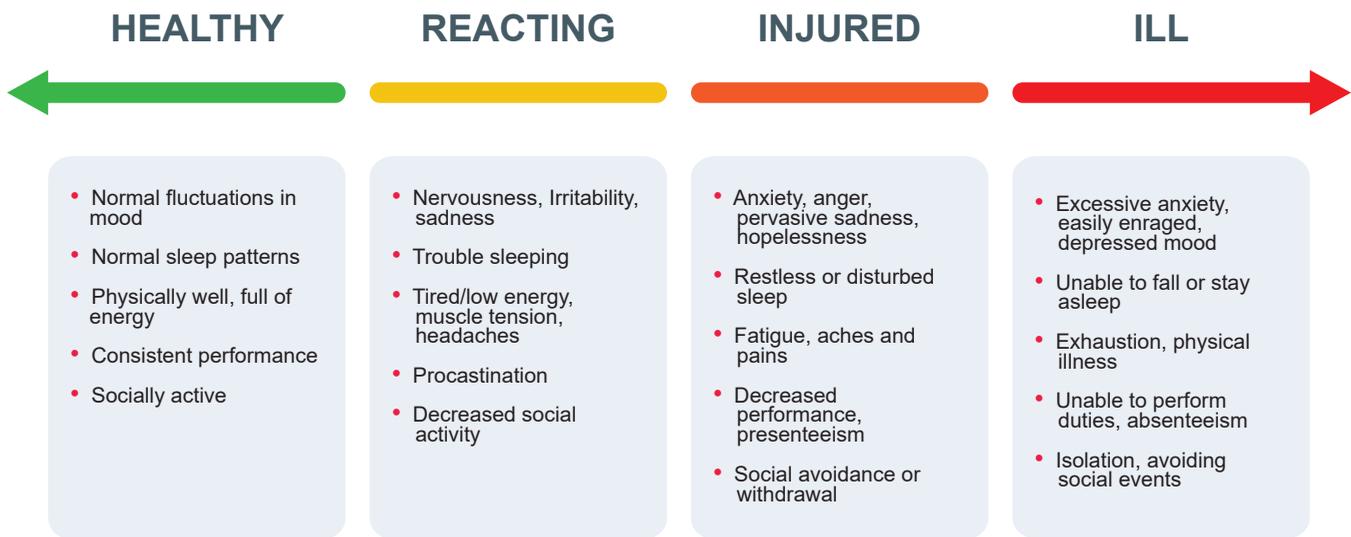
## Optimal mental health (flourishing)



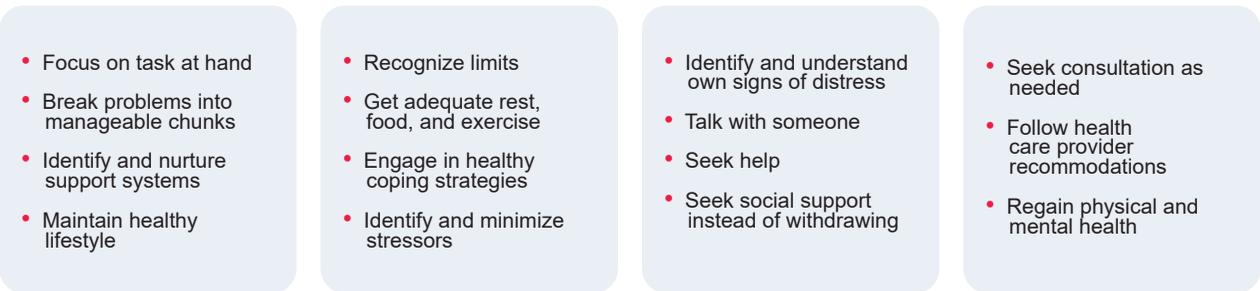
## Poor mental health (languishing)

If you have a mental illness, or are struggling and think you need support, it's important to reach out to a mental health professional - mental health challenges and mental illness are not meant to be faced alone. The key is to know when you should go see an expert and how to get in touch with them. An easy way to track how you're feeling is to use the colour code below. This is called the mental health continuum, which is a quick way to see how your mental health is doing. Consider taking a moment each day or at least once a week, to make a note in your training journal of whether your mental health is in the green, yellow, orange or red zone. It's normal to move back and forth between the different zones. If you're very tired for example, you may find it harder to be motivated and cope with a teammate who gets on your nerves (yellow zone), but after a good rest you should be back in the green zone. If you find yourself in the yellow, orange or red zone often, it's probably time to talk to someone. You can do this exercise with your team's mental performance consultant if you'd like some support.

# Mental Health Continuum Model



## Actions to Take at Each Phase of the Continuum



## How Do I Know if I Need Help?

Our rule at Game Plan is: if you're thinking about asking for help, then ASK FOR HELP. Don't wait. The earlier you address a problem or potential problem the better.

## Which type of help is right for me?

This chart can help you make sense of the different types of support available to you. The first row compares types of mental health support to the support you get for physical injuries.

It's not a perfect analogy, but it helps to draw some parallels and make sense of the differences in education and scopes of practice of the various mental health practitioners licensed to provide care in Canada. It's also important to note that some people you'll work with may have multiple certifications. For example, you could have a mental performance consultant (MPC) who is also a psychologist.

	Career counsellor	Mental Performance Consultant (MPC)	Counsellor / psychotherapist	Registered / Clinical psychologist	Psychiatrist	Morneau-Shepell - Game Plan's mental health partner	Game Plan advisors
If this was a physical injury they would be:	A coach helping you plan the next months of training.	Your strength and conditioning coach	A massage therapist	A physiotherapist or chiropractor	A doctor	A mix of coach, massage therapist, and physiotherapist /chiropractor.	Varies by region - A mix of coach, massage therapist, and physiotherapist /chiropractor.
How they help	Can help you figure out your career plans	Can help you improve your performance through mental skills development and support.	Can help you improve your mental health and cope with symptoms of mental illness. Not able to make diagnoses	Can help you improve your mental health and cope with mental illness. They have more specialized training and can make diagnoses.	Similar mental health training to psychologists but are also medical doctors who can prescribe medication.	A wide range of services from career counselling to psychological support and crisis intervention.	The advisors have different skills. Ask yours about what they can help with. If they can't help you, they know who can.
If you think you need help with your mental health	They will refer you to an expert	They will refer you to an expert	If your symptoms are mild to moderate they can help you work through things. Otherwise, they'll refer you to a clinical colleague	Psychologists can work with most mental illnesses. Some specialize in specific problems (e.g., eating disorders) and may refer to a specialized colleague or a psychiatrist if they think medication is necessary.	Depending on their training they may be more comfortable treating some mental illnesses over others.	The hotline provides immediate 24/7 support. If your needs are outside their expertise they will refer you to an expert.	If it's within what they're trained to do, they can help. otherwise, they'll refer you to an expert.
Can I check their credentials?	Look for college /university education and special training.	They should be a Professional Member of the Canadian Sport Psychology Association, but not all MPCs are.	Look and ask for proof of specialized training. The rules are different in each province. They should be certified through the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association or a provincial / territorial	Rules are different in each province, but highly regulated. They will be registered with their provincial or territorial college of psychologists.	They will be a member of a Medical College. Highly regulated like any doctor is in Canada.	Morneau Shepell ensures all their practitioners are appropriately trained and vetted.	A range of training and experience that has been vetted by their centre or institute and Game Plan.
How to pay for it	May be available through your school or through Game Plan	May be covered by your sport.	May be covered by your school, sport, Game Plan, or insurance.	May be covered by your school, sport, Game Plan, or insurance.	Provincial health insurance.	Game plan, EAP (Employee Assistance Program)	Game Plan

**Note: this table is a reference tool and not a legal document. You should always check with someone you trust or your Game Plan advisor if you're unsure.**

If you want to enhance your sport performance, a mental performance consultant is the best option. They can help you manage stress and emotions, improve your confidence, motivation, focus/concentration, time management, relationships with teammates and coaches, and more.

If you feel like you are not your usual self in the way you behave, feel or think, counsellors / psychotherapists, psychologists, Morneau-Shepell counselors, or a psychiatrist can help. To see a psychiatrist you will need a referral from your team doctor or your family doctor. If you're experiencing symptoms, or changes, or experiences, such as depression, anxiety, relationship difficulties (family, friends, partners, teammates), sadness and grief, disordered eating, low self-esteem, sleep problems, substance abuse, sexual orientation questions, challenges related to gender identity, and anything else that seems off, then a professional is the right choice. These often impair your sport performance, school, work, relationships and/or your well-being, so it's important to get help as early as possible.

During a challenging time, such as COVID-19, you may feel more anxious or depressed than usual due to isolation and social/physical distancing. You might also experience a lack of direction because you don't know when you'll be back at sport or when the next competition will be and you may feel like you can't make plans for the next few months. The pandemic shut-down may also deprive you from experiencing significant events like school prom or important exams that you have been preparing yourself for. Going through isolation because of this virus might make you start questioning your purpose in life and bigger-picture issues. It is normal to experience these feelings; psychological support from a professional can be helpful in exploring these challenges.

If you are unsure about what you like or are interested in, or where you want to work or study, a career counsellor may help you explore your options. They can help to determine which school program or career corresponds to your interests, strengths and values. Game Plan advisors can help you develop work skills and assist with networking. They can also provide support regarding retirement and career transition. The delay of the Olympics and Paralympics Games and the COVID-19 isolation may disrupt your career and studying plans and/or your retirement plans.



Remember that as a [member of the Canadian National Team](#), you have access to support. You have access to confidential 24/7 support through Morneau Shepell. You also have access to your Game Plan advisor, the Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport ([www.ccmhs-ccsms.ca/refer](http://www.ccmhs-ccsms.ca/refer)), your MPC, and, in some cases, your NSO, Centre or Institute may have someone on staff.

There are also other free resources available. Here is our [Canadian Athlete Mental Health Resource Guide](#). If you feel like you are in need, do not hesitate to ask for help. If you find yourself in a crisis you should call 911.

# CANADIAN NATIONAL TEAM ATHLETE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE GUIDE

As a Canadian National Team athlete you have access to the following resources:

## In Canada:

### IF IT'S A CRISIS, GO TO YOUR NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM OR CALL:

- Your team doctor or personal doctor
- 911
- The 24h mental health crisis line  
1-866-996-0991 (crisisline.ca)
- The 24h Morneau Shepell hotline  
1-844-240-2990

### IF IT'S NON URGENT, CONTACT:

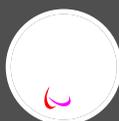
- Your team doctor or personal doctor
- The 24h Morneau Shepell hotline  
1-844-240-2990 (Olympic/Paralympic coaches can access this too)
- Your Game Plan Advisor: [mygameplan.ca](http://mygameplan.ca)
- The Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport (CCMHS)  
[ccmhs-ccsms.ca/self-referral-form](http://ccmhs-ccsms.ca/self-referral-form) OR  
613-454-1409 ext. 2090 OR [info@ccmhs-ccsms.ca](mailto:info@ccmhs-ccsms.ca)
- Your Mental Performance Consultant

## Outside of Canada, contact:

- Team doctor or personal doctor
- Your mental performance consultant
- Your Game Plan Advisor: [mygameplan.ca](http://mygameplan.ca)
- The Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport (CCMHS)  
[ccmhs-ccsms.ca/self-referral-form](http://ccmhs-ccsms.ca/self-referral-form) OR  
613-454-1409 ext. 2090 OR  
[info@ccmhs-ccsms.ca](mailto:info@ccmhs-ccsms.ca)
- Morneau Shepell hotline: To access the care from outside of North American use the applicable international dialing number from that country: <https://www.workhealthlife.com/Tools/AccessTo%20EAPWorldwideAccessInfo/div/InPageDivNarrow>

And let them know you're part of Game Plan. (Olympic/Paralympic coaches can access this too)

Always remember: You know yourself, so even if you feel a little off, be proactive and talk to someone.



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