



**USOPC**

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## For Athletes: The Mental Side of Returning to Training

It is a strange time in our world. We have spent weeks at home, plans have been changed countless times, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games have been postponed. Through this chaos no one has been training in gyms, pools or other group settings. Now we are talking about going back. That brings a range of emotions, including both excitement and fear. Athletes most likely feel excited to resume training and regain some patterns of normalcy. At the same time, there will be fears about so many unknowns and potential risks. We WILL get back, but we will face some challenges.

### Tips for Returning to Training:

1. Everyone is an individual. You will respond as you do. Your feelings are valid! Likewise, your teammates' feelings are valid...and they may be different than yours. Accept each other where you are. That is exactly where you each need to be.
2. Attend to your anxieties and worries. Talk to your coaches, parents and trusted friends. Make sure you have a voice. If you feel something, say something. Then find solutions together.
3. We will all have to adapt. The most important muscle in adapting is the mental muscle. When we face adversity, we become stronger, and that builds resilience.
4. Communicate with coaches and staff.
5. Physically isolate. But don't socially disconnect. Be creative in staying connected yet safe.
6. Realize that your body won't feel the same after time off. Be kind to yourself and manage expectations to be realistic about what you can achieve when training resumes.
7. Similarly, your confidence might not be where it was. Be patient and be kind to yourself. Your confidence will return with more training time.

### Get Your Mental Game up to Speed:

During times when you can't train physically, you can train mentally.

1. Use imagery. Imagery is creating a picture in the mind's eye. While you are waiting to return to the training, close your eyes and imagine what it will be like to come back. Use all your senses and imagine walking into your training area for the first time and what it feels like to be in that space again.
2. Set goals. Remember to be realistic. The goals you had on the day official training shut down will not be the goals you have now. Be smart and patient with yourself.
3. Stay present. It's easy to go back to what could have been or what you could do before. Be careful about this type of "time travel" and stick with what is.
4. Use mindfulness. Mindfulness involves intentionally focusing on the present moment and doing it nonjudgmentally. Often the focus point is the breath. Develop a mindfulness practice to stay present. Two good apps are Insight Timer and Headspace.

**For resources go to:** [TeamUSA.org/MentalHealth](https://TeamUSA.org/MentalHealth)