



USOPC

Sport Psychology

For Athletes: Coping with the Impact of Coronavirus

Change is inevitable and we are facing it now more than ever with the impact of the Coronavirus. Competitions have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed leaving all of us wondering what is next. Everything is changing by the day resulting in stress and a range of uncomfortable emotions. You might be feeling sad, anxious, angry, frustrated or even relieved if you needed more time to train and prepare. All of these emotions are normal responses to change and uncertainty, and you are not alone.

While we can't take these emotions away, we can work with them and learn to tolerate the uncertainty and discomfort we are experiencing. We can begin to view change as a challenge to tackle head on.

The Coronavirus is changing our perceptions of social space and how we interact with each other. We rely on people for support and many of us want personal interaction to feel supported. That is beginning to look different as we avoid social gatherings. We'll need to find a different way to be close and support each other in the new age of social distancing.

Training plans also may change with mandates to stay at home or closures of clubs and training sites. You'll need to find a way to continue training but it's going to look different. This is not impossible, just a new challenge.

In talking with many of you about how you are coping with these recent uncertainties, you have offered a number of useful suggestions. Everyone is an individual so some of these may or may not make sense for you, but these are ideas to consider. In any case, here are some ideas from your peers.

Suggestions from Athletes:

- When it all gets to be too much, come back to the present. Use your breath and cues to come back to center.
- Stick to your training plan for the next event. If that one is postponed or cancelled, focus on the plan for the next competition.
- Train like the Olympics and Paralympics is still going to happen as scheduled. Don't let up!
- View the changes as an adventure; the unknown is a challenge to be faced. You can face it better than anyone else.
- Look for the opportunities. With change and loss come other doors that open. Be ready to step through them.
- If you have been training hard and it's wearing on your body, now that there's not a competition right around the corner, use this time for additional recovery.
- Use this time to do other things you've been putting off.
- Get extra sleep!
- If you are going to practice social distancing and won't be seeing friends and family face-to-face, use some type of video format such as FaceTime, Skype or WhatsApp (rather than texts or calls). This keeps us a little more connected.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Realize that the whole world is dealing with these challenges, and we are all in the same boat.

General Suggestions:

Most of you have probably heard these suggestions already but they are worth repeating. If you are out and around others, be smart. There's a risk in anything we do, but you can minimize your risk by:

- Washing your hands thoroughly and often (at least 20 seconds with soap and water).
- Keeping your hands away from your face.
- Sanitizing your space and things you touch often.

Take the following steps to cope with our current changing environment:

- Take care of your body– Try to eat healthy well-balanced meals, train regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Connect with others– Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships, and build a strong support system.
- Take breaks– Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings are temporary and will fade. Try taking in deep breaths or doing activities you usually enjoy.
- Stay informed– When you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Watch, listen to, or read the news for updates from reliable sources of information. At the same time all this information can be overwhelming, so...
- Avoid too much exposure to news– Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. Try to do enjoyable activities and return to normal life as much as possible and check for updates between breaks.
- Seek help when needed– If distress is interfering with your daily life, talk to a sport psychologist, or mental health provider. Contact the USOPC Sport Psychology team to meet or assist you with a referral.