



# Mental Health Awareness Week

THIS WEEK, THE LONDON & SOUTH EAST  
REGIONAL TEAM ARE TALKING ALL THINGS  
MENTAL HEALTH, BOTH ON AND OFF THE  
COURT.

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# Mental Resilience

## *Mental Resilience, Injury and Lockdown*

12 months ago, having played netball for 20 years, I suffered by far the worst injury of my playing days, 3 knee ligaments torn, meniscus tear and fractured head of my tibia thrown in for good measure. In a flash that one move on the netball court took away all my independence and my ability to play netball, or any sport for that matter, which for me was so much more than running around a netball court a couple of times a week. Initially I spent over 6 weeks on crutches, 3 of those non-weight bearing, I couldn't drive, go to supermarkets or shops or use public transport (I lived in central London) and I lived in a Victorian converted flat where to get to my bedroom I had to climb 26 stairs, no lift! My 'normal' independent, spontaneous, sociable London lifestyle had been thrown into turmoil!

Most people would say I am a very positive, glass-half-full person almost all the time but the past 12 months have definitely been a big lesson in mental resilience when faced with a challenge, a lesson which has taught me a lot about myself and unexpectedly put me in a great position to mentally deal with the current bump in the road...lockdown! So, what did I do to build resilience during this time and adapt to the challenge that was ahead of me? I instilled the following 5 habits into my day to day life:

**Physical Exercise** - Initially this may sound strange as I was probably the least physically able I had ever been, however it soon became apparent that to stay mentally well during this time physical activity and eating well was key. Exercise may no longer have been in the shape of netball training, HIT sessions or going on runs but instead making the bum shuffle up and down the stairs for my 100th amazon delivery of the week, making the 100

metre trip to my local coffee shop for a change of scene and a flat white, building guns of steel in the process or doing an upper body workout. The joy I got when successfully getting somewhere with as few breaks as possible on my crutches was immense, it also brought a welcome distraction from sitting on my bum for too many hours a day, I am no good at sitting still and being sedentary! Further into my rehab the endorphins I got from exercise, whatever form that has taken, have been one of the best things to keep me feeling positive with the added kick you get from reaching milestones physically helping too. Moving into lockdown, exercise is one of the big things that has kept me happy, driven and mentally well and I have found having a routine for doing a variety of exercise has kept spirits high. It could have been pretty challenging as right about now, I am ready to hit a netball court again but instead I have been trying to do 2 runs, 3 HIT sessions and a yoga session a week and although I would rather be running around playing netball, the routine I have got going is a pretty good second best! It also helps having someone to train with, especially if they are a personal trainer - thanks Mum!

**Build strong relationships & stay connected** - surrounding myself with friends, family & people who had been through similar situations was crucial in making light of what seemed like a bad situation. I could quite easily have shut myself off from everyone and become really isolated but instead I made the conscious effort to stay connected and to find a distraction. I am such a positive person normally that I find it hard to talk about negative situations but I soon learnt that to feel better about my injury I needed to talk about how I felt. My friends were awesome and soon became the best agony aunts, comedians and chauffeurs around (one of the best things to come out of being on crutches was you get chauffeur driven everywhere and I decided I could get used to that life!). I used them as sounding boards and shared the good, the bad and the ugly experiences, but mostly it was so important for me to have an element of normality where my injury hadn't changed anything and I just caught up with friends.

Therefore learning to ask for help from pals to stay connected was so important, whether that be asking for a lift to go for brunch with the girls, asking them to pick up some food and drink up so I could have people round for dinner or meeting me at the pub 2 mins walk from my flat rather than in Soho so I didn't have to spend my whole pay cheque on Ubers. Early on in my rehab I connected with a couple of friends who had gone through recent ACL ruptures themselves and who could be honest but optimistic in talking through their experience which, when I wasn't feeling quite so good, made me see light at the end of the tunnel! I have taken the 'stay connected' mantra with me into lockdown as well and as much as sometimes having spent all day on zoom calls the last thing you feel like is once again staring at a screen with more faces on, I always feel so much better when I have connected with people. Whether it's a virtual G & T with my closest friends or a catch up with my brother even though he spends most of the call shouting 'Henry no' at his 14 week old chocolate lab puppy (yes he's one of those who bought a puppy as soon as lockdown hit) I always have a bigger smile on my face after. Connection is key for me for being resilient during lockdown.

**Don't blame yourself** - this can be easier said than done and something that I definitely mulled over in my head in terms of was it my fault? "If I had just landed slightly differently" or "If I had just warmed up a bit better" or "If I had done more strength and conditioning training" are definitely all things that went through my head. Ultimately, I was never going to know what had caused my knee to go bang, but blaming myself certainly wasn't going to help me feel any better about the situation. Through not blaming myself I eventually found comfort in blaming it on something else, in my case my menstrual cycle which is linked with ACL injuries, and through doing this a weight definitely lifted and gave me a much more optimistic outlook and enabled me to feel more mentally tough.

**See the problem as short term** - this was all about reassuring myself that this would pass and looking back now, my friends, family, physio and doctors played a key role in emphasising that. Initially when I couldn't walk and I was feeling stressed about hospital visits and getting a proper diagnosis so that I could then start prehab/rehab, it seemed like I was never going to get back to normal. I went through waves of feeling awful, but in this scenario gaining perspective and knowing that it would eventually dissipate was important to feel better mentally. This is very applicable to lockdown as in the terms of our lifespan this really is a short term problem, it will pass and seeing a positive outlook especially seeing other countries like New Zealand, coming out of their lockdown and detailing the start of their professional netball league really hammers home that we will get back to 'normal' eventually. We will have bad days where we feel rubbish but if you can reassure yourself that it will pass then the whole situation seems a lot sunnier and personally I can deal with it a whole lot more easily.

**Sleep** - I really don't think we talk enough about sleep and the benefits it has for us both mentally and physically but without a doubt getting a good nights sleep makes my whole world seem a more cheerful place and I am definitely more mentally resilient the next day. I am not the greatest sleeper at the best of times, going to sleep is fine, staying asleep is often a problem, waking up only once is a good night for me! It is a bit of a vicious circle for me when it comes to some factors that affect my sleep. If I am feeling stressed I sleep less well but if I sleep less well I feel more stressed - there are definitely some factors I can control which when feeling stressed about my injury I took into consideration. First and foremost, reducing my screen-time before bed, how often do you spend the last moments before your head hits the pillow scrolling the squares of Instagram or more lately watching yet another ridiculous video of Daisy May Cooper dancing to a TV theme tune on TikTok?

Having a tidy room is also such a key factor for me to ensure a really calm environment with no distractions, throw in a candle or 2 and I am onto a winning night's sleep (hopefully). Thirdly I am a big coffee fan (I was incredibly excited when my local independent coffee shop opened the other day for takeaways) and it may just be a placebo affect but if it works I am going to stick by it, avoiding any caffeine after about 3pm is vital or else I am buzzing all night leading to a more emotional day the next day! Lockdown has provided a really great opportunity to get into a really good sleep routine for me as in a 'normal' week my schedule is never the same day to day. Some days I am catching a 7am train to Loughborough and home late whilst other days I am in the London office working regular hours with plenty of time to unwind at the end of the day. It is therefore often hard to really get into a good sleep pattern so this is something I am grateful for in terms of lockdown as I am sleeping much better. I definitely still have bad night's sleep, periodically and then isolated lockdown life seems a bit more of a mountain to climb the next day but on the whole if I have slept well, I am definitely more mentally resilient as a result.

There are many habits that we can put into place to build mental resilience but for me the ones I have listed above have been key in feeling more mentally tough and able to conquer a challenge however big or small. Mental resilience is always a work in progress but it is really great to always have some tools in mind to act as your coping mechanism for when things get tough!