



Remote Jockey Athlete Support Group

Psychological Wellbeing Support

The current situation is not one that any of us has faced before but we have to pick through it and find out how this period could benefit you as a person. Many athletes enjoy an off-season where they can reflect on the season gone, and, looking at a return to sport, where they see the potential for improvement. While you may not be able to compete, this is a period where you can rest and recover and develop as a person off the horse. You have no idea how some of your colleagues are looking to develop an edge over the field during this time. Use it wisely! The following are some tips that may help you through this uncertain period:

Keep your world small

'Keeping your world small' is a mantra that the Navy SEALs have for times of extreme pressure/stress/anxiety during combat. It allows them to focus on what they can control, which in turn helps them execute the mission.

It can be easy to get caught up in all that is happening around the world and in terms of when racing will be back, but unfortunately, spending time and energy on things that are out of your control is not helpful for psychological well-being. Keeping your world small (e.g., what can I do with my day?), helps you focus on those things that are within your control.

Take it one day at a time. What does tomorrow look like? Who am I riding out for? How can I make the most of my time riding out there (e.g., developing relationships with staff/trainer/horses)?

The night before, give yourself one simple goal that you would like to achieve for the following day (e.g., finish a chapter in a book, spend half an hour on the guitar, bake some scones).

Routine, routine, routine

We are creatures of habit and the biggest challenge will be the need to adapt to a change in your routine. Hopefully, you will be able to remain riding out throughout this period which will keep your morning structured. The afternoons and evenings will require some thought and planning. You could spend one hour exercising, one hour cooking, and one hour on personal development. The IJF have done a wonderful job in putting home exercise videos together (<https://www.injuredjockeys.co.uk/articles/ijf-launch-stayathome-workouts--477>), you have many nutritionists to help with creating healthy meals, baking etc (<http://www.thepja.co.uk/members-info/nutrition/>) and JETS have many online courses that you can complete (<http://www.jets-uk.org/jockeys/training-courses/>).

While routine is vital, things also have to be enjoyable, you cannot be your own slave driver. Make sure to have fun and enjoy this time spent at home which, especially for those with young families, is precious. Social media has been brilliant in this regard presenting content



such as the 'Toilet Roll Keep Uppy' and the 'Bring Sally Up' challenges. There's plenty more out there, so get involved!

Self-isolating while self-isolating

If you are self-isolating with family and friends, it is only natural that relationships may become tense as a result of time spent together. It is important to take some time out on your own, whether this happens to be during your exercise periods, or having a cup of coffee on your own before your housemates/family get up. It may even be going to your room at some point during the day, picking up a book or listening to a podcast.

This time can also be used to reflect on your day. Has it been a good or bad day? What was good/bad about it? How do you feel you are coping? There are various sources of support available if you feel that you would like to use them.

Keep in touch

While taking time for yourself is important, equally as important is keeping in touch with family and friends. You might be dealing with this situation well, but there are many people out there concerned for their health, their livelihood or even both. One phone call could make a massive difference to their day. There are also many platforms (Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc.) where people are hosting events like virtual pub nights and table quizzes, so it's worth investigating if you can organise something in your friendship group or family.

Practice gratitude

Although this is a frustrating time being unable to work, for the most part, we all have access to food, shelter and Wi-Fi. We are still hugely privileged in comparison to a vast majority of the world and I think that it's important to keep that perspective. Be grateful for what you have.

It is also helpful to remind yourself that, as a jockey, it is a privilege to do what you love for a living. Many people have to do jobs that they don't like for a variety of reasons. You get paid for your passion. Being frustrated with not riding is a healthy sign that you are living an intentional life, that you are pursuing something that is meaningful to you.

When racing returns, and it will return, you will get to go back to doing what you love for a living- that's something worth appreciating.

Things you can do for you

- Audiobooks (many jockeys and other sports people's autobiographies on there).
- Yoga classes on YouTube (improving core strength, balance, flexibility etc.).
- Mindfulness through guided meditation apps (there are many free ones on the App Store, including <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>).
- Podcasts covering any and every topic that you may be interested in.



- Improving the content on your social media, creating a website to promote yourself as a professional.

Things that you can do for others

- Offering to cook meals for the house, try out a new dish.
- Check on elderly neighbours, might they need help with shopping?
- Can you volunteer for anyone else in the community (e.g., NHS workers)?
- Get in touch with someone that you haven't spoken to in a while, see how they're doing.
- Keep in contact with family, those closest to you will worry the most.

What if you are struggling?

These are very testing and stressful times for everyone and if you are struggling emotionally you will not be alone. The important thing you need to know is that you're not alone and support is available. One of our greatest strengths is the ability to ask for help so don't hesitate to pick up the phone and we will do our best to use the support we have on hand to get you back on track. You can do so confident in the knowledge that any issues you have will be dealt with in the strictest confidence.

The PJA works with Sporting Chance to provide a 24/7 helpline and national support network and will pay for any initial sessions you may require (the first six, with a further six based on recommendation from the therapist).

Do feel free to speak to Paul (07966 590105) or Izzy (07771 656396) who have both referred many members for assistance, including in the last couple of weeks. Alternatively, you can call the helpline directly on 07780 008877 and this is manned 24hrs a day. From 9.00am to 5.00pm it will be answered by Sporting Chance and outside of those hours the service is provided by Health Assured, where you will be able to speak with a counsellor directly.

Aodhagan Conlon, our retained Performance Consultant is also always on hand to speak to PJA members. Aodhagan is a former jockey and is currently doing his PhD on his way to becoming a Sports Psychologist. His contact details are 07815 016900 and he's on Twitter at @aodhaganconlon

As always, please do not hesitate to contact any of the team should you have any questions or need any further information.

Stay well and stay safe.

Team PJA