

Resilience for Covid-19

It is often said that running a marathon requires 90% mental capabilities, so in addition to building and maintaining physical fitness, a successful long-distance runner will also need to train for mental fitness. Successfully navigating our way through a Covid-19 disrupted world also requires us to train for mental fitness.

There is plenty of good advice available on how to remain physically healthy – wash your hands, maintain physical distance, stay home and so on. As we don't know how long we will have to keep physically isolated and without our regular work and routines, some of us are running out of patience. We have to pay as much attention to our mental health as we do to our physical health if we want to come through the pandemic successfully.

Resilience is a form of mental toughness that will sustain us during this pandemic. Martin Seligman, a psychologist celebrated for his study of resilience, says that resilience is made up of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement. Below are some steps to build your positive emotions using mindfulness.

- Research shows that taking short regular breaks during the day builds resilience
- Learn to understand your stress signals, such as shortness of breath, tightness across your chest, tight shoulder muscles, headache or sore back muscles. Recognise that everybody's stress signals are different, so learn to be aware about your own body's reaction to stress.
- Take deep breaths to release your tensions
- Mindfulness contributes to positive emotions, which in turn contribute to resilience



Here are some steps for building resilience

Step 1 Calming

- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for about 10 – 15 minutes
- Sit comfortably or lie down if you prefer
- Close your eyes. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, then pick a spot in front you at eye level and focus your attention on the spot for the duration of the exercise

- Notice your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply – breathe in slowly as you count quietly from 1 – 4; now breath out to the count of 4; repeat this several times. You know you are breathing deeply when your stomach muscles are expanding and contracting
- Keep breathing until you have developed a rhythm; do this until the end of the exercise.

Step 2 Scanning

- Starting from the top of your head, scan your body for any tensions. Pause for a few moments at each tension point
- As you breath out, release the tension, and repeat this several times before moving on to the next part of your body
- Start with your head, followed by the neck, shoulders, left upper arm, lower arm and fingers, right upper arm, lower arm and fingers, chest, stomach, back upper and lower, left thigh muscles, calf muscles and foot, right thigh, calf and foot
- Now let the whole body relax and imagine that the chair (or floor if you are lying down) is holding you up
- Tell yourself you are safe and comfortable

Step 3 Affirming

- Continue to breathe deeply and stay relaxed
- Keep your eyes closed or fixed on the spot that you have chosen
- Imagine a place that you would like to go where you will feel safe, relaxed and comfortable
- The place could be anywhere real or imaginary, for example by a lake surrounded by hills, with a gentle breeze on your face, with the temperature just right. You might imagine there are birds, flowers and green meadows and the scene is just perfect
- Imagine the place in great detail, to the extent you feel like you are really there
- Now say to yourself “I am safe relaxed and comfortable here.” Repeat this a few times
- Give yourself a sign that will take you to this place anytime you want. For example, you could hold your little finger on your left hand, or rub your ring or your watch or massage your hand with your other hand
- Say to yourself: ‘every time I do this, I will feel immediately safe and relaxed’.

Step 4 Re-entry

- Slowly open your eyes
- Take your time and when you are ready you can get up.

Repeat this exercise at least twice a day. In-between exercises, if you feel stressed, give yourself the sign to feel calm, relaxed and safe. You can do this anytime. In fact, it is best to practice this as often as you can, even if you are not stressed. The more often you practice this process, your brain can be re-programmed (that is, it develops new neural pathways) to positive emotions and resilience.