

# Why a sports injury can harm our mental health

A sprained ankle can mean more than a few weeks off the pitch or the running track. Professor Sarah Niblock, CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, and therapist Gary Bloom explore how physical injury can have an impact on emotional wellbeing



Anyone can be psychologically affected by a sports injury, from

professional athletes to weekend runners. Being restricted in this way can have a significant impact, especially for those who exercise for stress relief or rely on sport to support them financially. In this month's podcast, I speak to sports psychotherapist Gary Bloom about the emotional repercussions of sports injuries.

*Sarah*

CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy

The fallout of a sports injury can be far-reaching, says UKCP psychotherapist Gary Bloom

When someone is injured, our primary concern is the physical symptoms of the injury and we may not realise the effect it can have on our mental wellbeing until much later. Of course, the psychological impact depends on many factors, such as the severity of the injury and time away from training, but also what that activity means to the individual – perhaps crucial time to think or deal with life's stresses.

For professional sportspeople, there are other factors that might affect their mental wellbeing, such as worries around loss of income

and status. Overnight, a broken limb could put you out of commission for the foreseeable future. This can have a dramatic impact on your sense of identity and financial security. There are also physiological effects because the endorphins released by someone training most days will no longer be produced, sometimes resulting in low mood and even depression.

## Feelings and physicality

The role of psychotherapy in the world of sport is increasingly proving its effectiveness. I work with sportspeople and encourage them to voice their uncertainty about their injury, which allows them to face their fears for the future. They look at the impact it could have on their life and career, and often the psychotherapeutic space is the only place they feel like they can talk openly. Working with sportspeople to



## HOW I BECAME A THERAPIST



Sports expert Gary Bloom explains his journey into psychotherapy

FOR MANY YEARS, I WORKED as a sports commentator. I was that bloke on the telly who shouted 'goal!' for a living. It was great fun, but it wasn't as relational as I wanted.

I tried my hand at a few other things, but it was only when I went into therapy myself that something clicked. I tried a certificate year, learning basic counselling skills. This spurred me to continue and I completed a four-year postgraduate diploma.

Now, I'm back in the sporting realm as the only practitioner working psychotherapeutically in a professional football club with players and coaching staff. I also work with elite athletes from other sports and non-athletes from the business community, and I find their needs similar. Although you will still find me broadcasting, my psychotherapeutic work is easily the most rewarding thing I've ever done. @Bloomers57

## Is my sports injury affecting me psychologically?

From torn ligaments to fractured bones and beyond, Gary Bloom lists six considerations to help you assess the emotional impact of your injury

**1 What now?** What does injury mean to you – the end of your career or, if you are unable to go for a run, do you need to find another way to manage your stress?

Are they changed by your injury? If so, how do you feel about that?

**2 You and your injury:** Because you can no longer exercise, even temporarily, how does your injury affect the way you view yourself?

**5 Do you have a support network?** Are there friends and family members you can talk to about how you feel? Consider turning to a coach or psychotherapist to help you understand the physiological impact of your injury.

**3 Consider past injuries:** Have you been injured before? How did it affect you? Do you worry that you won't recover this time?

**6 Your alternatives:** If you are unable to play sport or exercise with your injury, can you participate in other ways? Can you support your team or exercise differently for now?

**4 Think about the future:** What are your sporting goals?



## The podcast

Sports injuries affect people differently, but they can have a deep psychological impact on both the pro and amateur athlete. Listen to Sarah Niblock and Gary Bloom talk about how a sports injury can adversely affect psychological wellbeing and what to do about it at [tinyurl.com/ukcpsport](https://tinyurl.com/ukcpsport)

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## About the UKCP and how to find a therapist

The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) is the leading research, innovation, educational and

regulatory body working to advance psychotherapy for the benefit of all. We have a register of more than 8,000 individual members, who offer a range of therapy approaches for couples, individuals, families and groups. We also have more than 70 training

and accrediting organisations for those who wish to become psychotherapists.

To find the right therapist for you, or learn how to become a therapist, visit [psychotherapy.org.uk](https://psychotherapy.org.uk)

