

Wellbeing & Communication



Athletics Ireland

Conversation Series

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Welcome Note

This is the second event in our Athletics Ireland conversation series and was developed to acknowledge all the hard work and dedication that coaches, parents and volunteers put in often behind the scenes and without fanfare. Our athletics community wouldn't be where it is today without your work. This PDF is focused on supporting you and ensuring you get the very most from your time supporting athletes and young people up and down the country (*while looking after yourself at the same time*).



Orna Murray,
*Your Health Psychology
Researcher & Facilitator*

I have a Master's in Health Psychology from NUIG and an Honors Degree in Applied Psychology from UCC. I have both professional and personal experience working with elite athletes, having had the opportunity to work as part of an elite sports science team, while also representing Ireland internationally for both distance running and squash. Passionate about sports and women's health I am working towards ensuring the next generation has the tools and the support they need to reach their athletic and personal potential.

We want to offer support so that they understand their bodies and are able to work with them rather than against them. We hope to create a movement where girls from all backgrounds want to get active and stay active for life.



Grace Lynch,
*Athlete Development Manager, Athletics Ireland
Co-Facilitator*

As a member of the Irish athletics community from the age six, athletics has been an integral part of my life. Athletics has helped me to grow as a person, discover my passion and connect to others with similar interests and drive in life. Athletics can pose many challenges and while these challenges provide growth and progression through learning, it has highlighted to me the importance of having support in specific areas which can provide help in navigating some of the obstacles we encounter. Orna and I shared a vision and so the Athletics Ireland conversation series was born. It is our belief that these workshops focus on four very important areas which resonate with so many others. Through Orna's expertise and the input from our community, we hope to provide an experience that not only sheds light on these topics but helps to begin a community of practice within the Irish athletics scene. It is our hope that this community will continue to grow and help to support the current and future generations of Irish athletics members.

Our Perspectives on Wellbeing

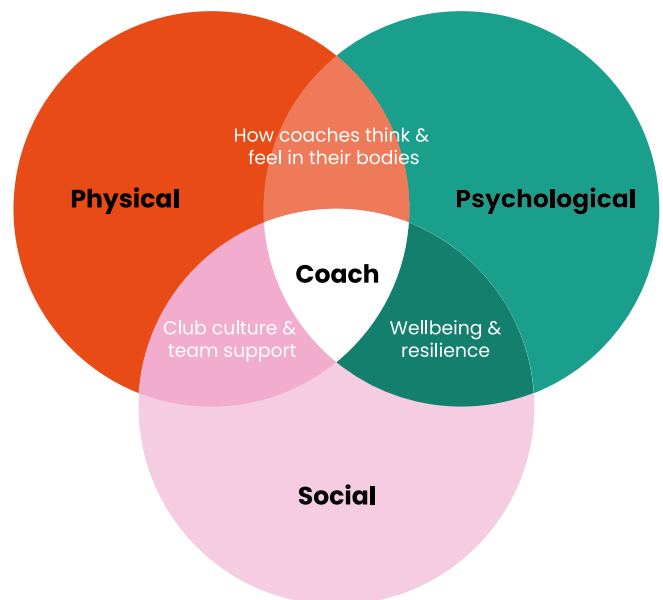
It's never easy to prioritise looking after your health and wellbeing when pushing through feels more productive. Volunteers and coaches give their time and energy so generously, sometimes at the expense of looking after themselves. As coaches, you have such scope for positive impact on those you train and the communities you are part of but if we want our athletes to look after themselves, we need to ensure we demonstrate what that looks like. It takes time to fully appreciate how productive rest is and it takes practice to make space for downtime and relaxation, but by valuing and prioritising filling your cup (whatever that may look like for you) you inadvertently help create a new social norm where others can do the same. Taking care of yourselves is the real work – it helps you be a better coach and enables you to bring out the best in your athletes.

Main Topics & Psychological Theory

Bio-Psycho-Social Model

The biopsychosocial model is a helpful framework used in medicine and psychology that considers biological, psychological, and social factors in understanding health and wellbeing. It can also be a useful tool in the coaching world as it explains how health outcomes are often the result of complex interactions between these three factors, rather than just one.

- 1. Physical**
physiology, genetics and physical health
- 2. Psychological**
thoughts, feeling and behaviors
- 3. Social**
environment, culture and relationships

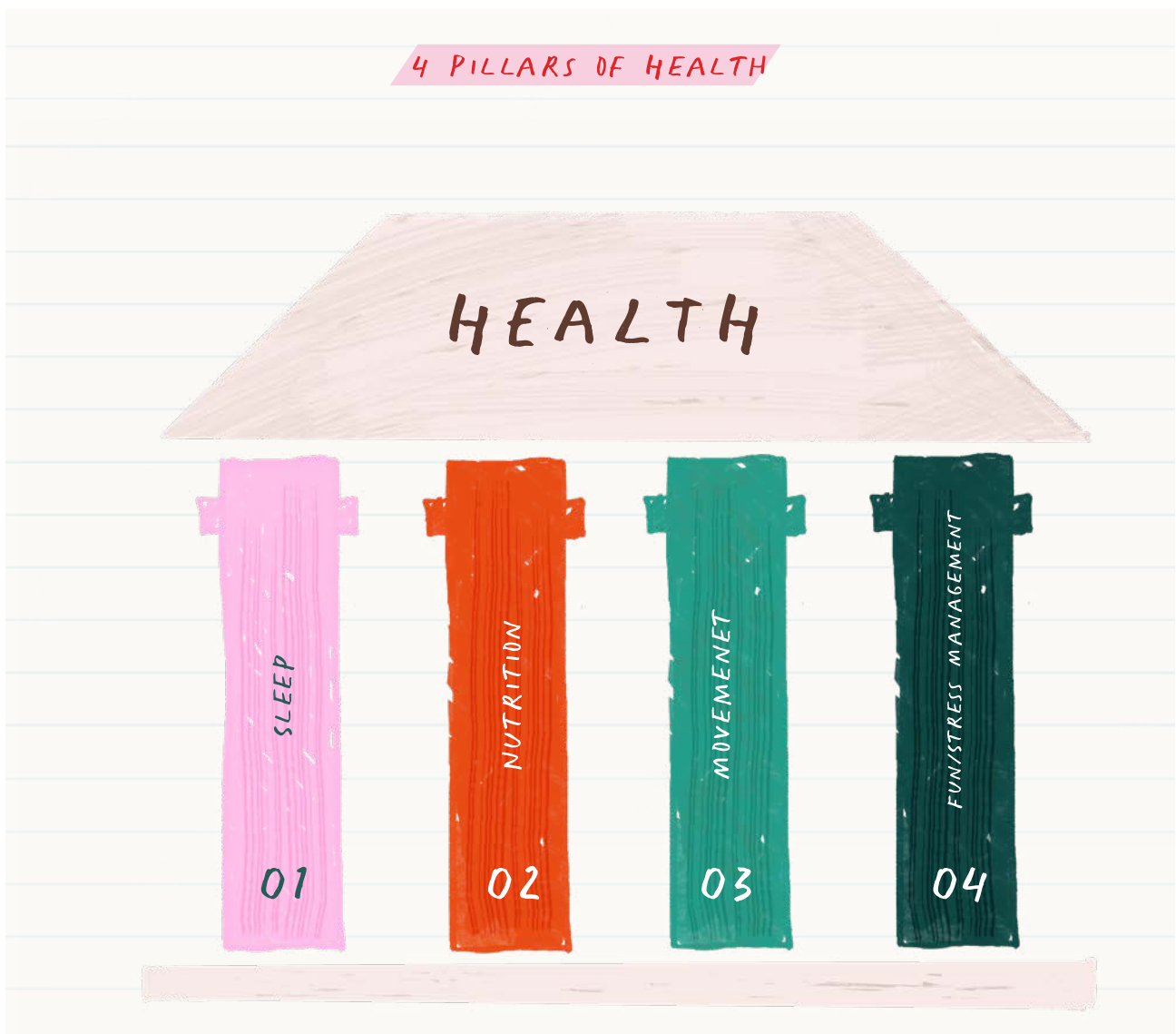


What is an Integrative Health Approach?

Our health is a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease. Integrative health is looking at both the mind and the body and how they influence each other. Tools like the biopsychosocial model and the pillars of health help us to see a more comprehensive snapshot of where our health and wellbeing is.

Pillars of Health

Volunteers and coaches are the foundation of every club, they consistently show up and are the leaders within their clubs and communities. Often juggling multiple roles and responsibilities, which is why your health and wellbeing is crucial to all those you support. We use the pillars of health to help us map out and identify potential gaps in your health and wellbeing and the impact that might be having on your day-to-day life..



01 Sleep

Sleep is an essential process for supporting physical and mental health, as it enables the body to repair and restore itself. It's like the swiss army knife of health and recovery and can often be overlooked when it comes to performance and health.

Alongside the quantity of sleep, our sleep quality is really important. Sleep hygiene refers to our habits and practices that can improve our sleep. Good sleep hygiene means having a daily routine that promotes consistent, uninterrupted sleep. What's going on in our lives can impact how we're sleeping and we all go through phases of not getting enough quality sleep. Getting the full eight hours is great, but sometimes it's beyond our control, so focus on making one or two small changes that might improve your sleep quality.

Caffeine

Caffeine can have both positive and negative effects on the body. **So how much caffeine is too much?** People have different sensitivity to caffeine so it's a good idea to check in with yourself. Are you experiencing insomnia, jitteriness, headaches, or anxiety? If so it can be a good idea to scale back your intake or move to decaffeinated coffee.

Light Exposure

Light exposure (*natural and artificial*) influences the regulation of your circadian rhythm or 'sleep-wake' cycle. Getting **natural light, especially during the morning time can help regulate your internal clock and improve cognitive function.** On the other hand, using electronic devices late at night can lead to sleep disturbances.

02 Nutrition

How you eat matters as well as what you eat. Coaches are often on the go a lot of the time, eating on the road and not having the time to prioritise sitting down to eat. We know you already know what you 'should' do - so keep it simple and again, start small and build some healthy habits into your routine. For advice on nutrition please connect and check-in with a qualified nutritionist if you need more support with your diet and eating habits.

Chew Your Food (Slow down) & Enjoy it

One of the best health hacks on the market (*and it's free*)! **Chewing your food helps the breakdown of food**, so it's **easier for your body to digest and use!** It's also easy, free and requires no major change - because you're doing it already, the invitation is to just do more of it. **Top tip** - put your phone away when you're eating, pay attention to the food and enjoy it!

Hydration

Water is the most important nutrient for the body and is essential for our overall health and wellbeing plus it can help prevent fatigue and headaches. Remember we are composed of 60% water. Drinking more water is an easy win with a big impact - if you prioritise your hydration your athletes will follow suit. Remember hydration also comes from fruit and soups as well!

03 Movement

As coaches, you know all about how sports and physical activity can change how we feel and develop the best parts of us. Moving often and being active is essential for overall physical and mental wellbeing. It's recommended that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. Ensuring you get your own movement each day will pay dividends in the long run, not only for your own health but role modeling that behavior of being active for life to athletes.

04 Fun/Stress Management

Keeping fun and enjoyment as a key part of our lifestyle is a protective factor when it comes to managing stress and looking after our wellbeing. Stress is a natural healthy response we have on a daily occurrence, however, chronic stress is when our body doesn't fully recover or relax after a stressful incident. It is chronic stress that can have negative effects on physical and mental wellbeing.

Having fun and doing activities we genuinely enjoy allows our bodies to switch off stress hormones (*adrenaline and cortisol*) and release the feel-good hormones, providing us with the relaxation response, (*dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin*). Choose an activity that YOU enjoy, this might look like: a short walk outdoors, a dip in the sea, hot chocolate by the fire or calling a good friend. It's easy to recommend downtime to athletes, but often coaches' own stress can be overlooked.

Activity

Take a moment to write down one or two things you genuinely enjoy doing. When was the last time you were able to do them? Are there ways to include more of what you love doing?

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At any point, you can draw out the diagram below to identify gaps in your health and wellbeing that might need some attention. Our circumstances are constantly changing so it can be a good idea to do at the start of the season for yourself. Additionally, if any of your athletes is tired or seems 'off' this can be a useful framework to gently check in on how they are doing and discover problems early on.



How To Use

Lets start with sleep. What score would you give yourself out of 10 for your current sleep habits? What score would you ideally want? The gap between where you are and where you want to be will show you where some extra attention might be really beneficial. Repeat this with all 4 pillars.

Communication & Being a Role Model

Using the pillars of health as a framework will not only benefit your own health but it can be a helpful communication tool that can be applied to the wellbeing of your athletes. Effective communication involves both verbal and nonverbal cues, and it's important to pay attention to both.

People don't always believe what you say, but they do see what you do and hear how you talk about it. When you take action to prioritise your own health and wellbeing it positively impacts those around you too. If your athletes hear you talking about sleep, or see you prioritising hydration, they will also start to do the same.

Where to Start

- Keep you and your athletes best interests at heart, any conversation that comes from a place of genuine concern is a great place to start from.
- Look after yourself alongside looking out for your athletes.
- We all appreciate it when someone is real with us, so when it comes to discussing the challenges around wellbeing, staying open and honest is extremely reassuring for your athletes.

Supportive Environment

- It takes time to build trust between a group, or an athlete and a coach. Expect it to take time and allow it to grow naturally over time.
- Every experience is a learning opportunity and being part of a supportive environment for you as a coach and for your athletes is extremely advantageous.

Reflection points

- What's important for you when it comes to communication and creating culture to bring this conversation more into the mainstream?

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