

50 SHADES OF GREY MATTER

AN INJURED RUNNER CAN BE A VERY UNHAPPY PERSON. USING A POSITIVE MINDSET MAY HELP YOU HEAL, AND GET YOU BACK TO RUNNING MUCH FASTER

WORDS: TINA CHANTREY

It's possible that when you are injury-free you don't really notice other runners during your daily comings and goings. Then, injury strikes and you find yourself staring at your trainers – your best friends – and runners that pass your house, or car, with feelings that almost amount to grief!

Running can help us cope with and process so much in our lives, and becomes an old friend we can truly rely on, whatever we face. It helps us feel amazing physically, but also can bring emotional and mental clarity.

Take this away and you may be left feeling a huge sense of loss. What can you do to counteract this? Kim Ingleby is a Team GB 'mind ninja' and sports NLP master coach. "It's frustrating being injured, and it's natural to feel angry, sad and fearful even, yet how you use your recovery time can be invaluable," she says. "Use this time wisely and bravely to come up with a more focused plan for your running."

Thinking about what you could do to improve your running is key. Plan and focus on how you're going to be an even better runner upon your return. Use the time to assess your weaknesses and strategise over how you are going to address them. "Look at your rest and training logs to see if you could improve this area," suggests Kim, "and try out new recipes to improve your nutrition."

Viewing this time as a chance to take stock, and come back stronger, may result in you becoming a better runner. "Why not use the time to create some great soundtracks, read inspiring books,

make new tasty recipes and watch feel-good movies if you cannot get outside and train," says Kim. "Now is the time to make something happen, such as learning a new skill."

RUNNING HIGH TO LOW

Last year started off so well for Fiona Terris. She was fighting fit after running five marathons and an overnight ultra in 2014. Nearly every weekend saw her racing in southern France on the steep limestone cliffs and forests.

"Then in April I went over on my ankle during a race, finished but ended up in the ambulance after crossing the line," she says. "At the same time I started suffering from chronic eczema. My skin was so sore I could hardly walk. Sadly, I stopped running." This proved devastating for Fiona.

"It was my stress-buster which would, in turn, help with the eczema. Races I had signed up for came and went, I gave up reading about all the wonderful running my friends were doing, and on the day of the Paris Marathon, a regular feature in my race calendar, I was miserable and didn't even go online."

By autumn Fiona was wondering if she would ever run again. "I put on 10kg as moving made my skin crack and bleed," she says.

Then Fiona's situation deteriorated further. Her back seized and she was diagnosed with a slipped disc and sciatica in her left leg. "I couldn't get out of bed, the pain was incredible," she recalls. Fiona decided she needed to take control of her body. She stopped taking painkillers, forced



herself to move, which she built up to a daily walk, and tried some gentle stretching.

The next stage was to try to run. "My son volunteered to come out with me and in January we ran a few steps very slowly," she says. "The feeling of euphoria that I experienced was so strong, I was running again!"

Fiona has since completed some short sessions with her international group of runners, Let's Run Paris, where she was a pacer before injury, and recently ran in the inaugural Paris parkrun. "I've missed the discipline and friendship so much. I've lost so much strength in my legs and currently have the lung function of a gnat but I've lost the extra 10kgs and my eczema has improved."

GETTING YOUR 'FIX'

"Coming off the endorphin high that running gives can make you feel terrible, physically and mentally," says Kerry Sutton, a run coach and ultrarunning mentor to Threshold Sports.

It's time to think of what you can do to replace that feeling, not what you can't do. Even though we should all use injury time productively to cross-train, and to work on our strength and conditioning, there are other things you can do to make life bearable.

Is it possible you can still get out every day, for a brisk walk? This will give you a similar sense of freedom that running brings. "Time on feet is brilliant for your return to running and just being outside in the open air is wonderful for your Vitamin D and well-being," adds Kim.

How can you utilise this extra time you have for yourself? "I recommend my runners use this time to do extra stretching, so that you are in tip-top

shape when you can run again," says Kerry. Not only will your body feel better, your mind will be temporarily stilled.

This is a time to readjust your focus. "Try not to think of the long-term implications of not running," adds Kerry. "If you are going to miss your target race, so be it, but remember there are hundreds of other half-marathons and marathons you can enter. Give yourself another goal – find another comparable race or distance to enter that you can look forward to training for. If your emotional response is positive now, it can have a direct impact on your recovery."

Midgie Thompson, a mental performance and lifestyle coach, who has just returned to running following her own injury, suggests you spend time on visualisation. It is generally acknowledged that visualisation exercises help the body to programme itself to be able to do whatever skill you are imagining yourself doing.

"Try doing some mental rehearsal of running injury-free and pain-free," she suggests. This will help to pre-programme your body for when you get back to running. "It might even speed up recovery," she says.

FIGHT OFF THE BLUES

One strategy to combat feelings of depression is to explore what other exercises you can do to get your running endorphin 'fix'. Can you take up swimming or do a bike spinning class? Can you do yoga, stretching or a core strength class? "Anything that gets the body moving, perhaps in a gentler manner than what might aggravate the injury, helps produce endorphins and feel-good feelings," says Midgie.

Think about the amount of time you spend on feeling sorry for yourself, moaning about the injury to anyone who will listen or about the inconvenience of not being able to run. "How is that helping you to move forward and go where you want to go?" she says. "How might you use that time in a more constructive and positive manner? What needs to happen for you to shift your focus onto something that is more positive?"

FILL YOUR TIME

Keep bringing your focus on what you can do, not what you can't. "Why not get a good massage" suggests Kerry, "as this will help your running? If it's a short-term injury maximise the time you have off running to enjoy the things you haven't been able to fit in due to training, like quality time with friends."

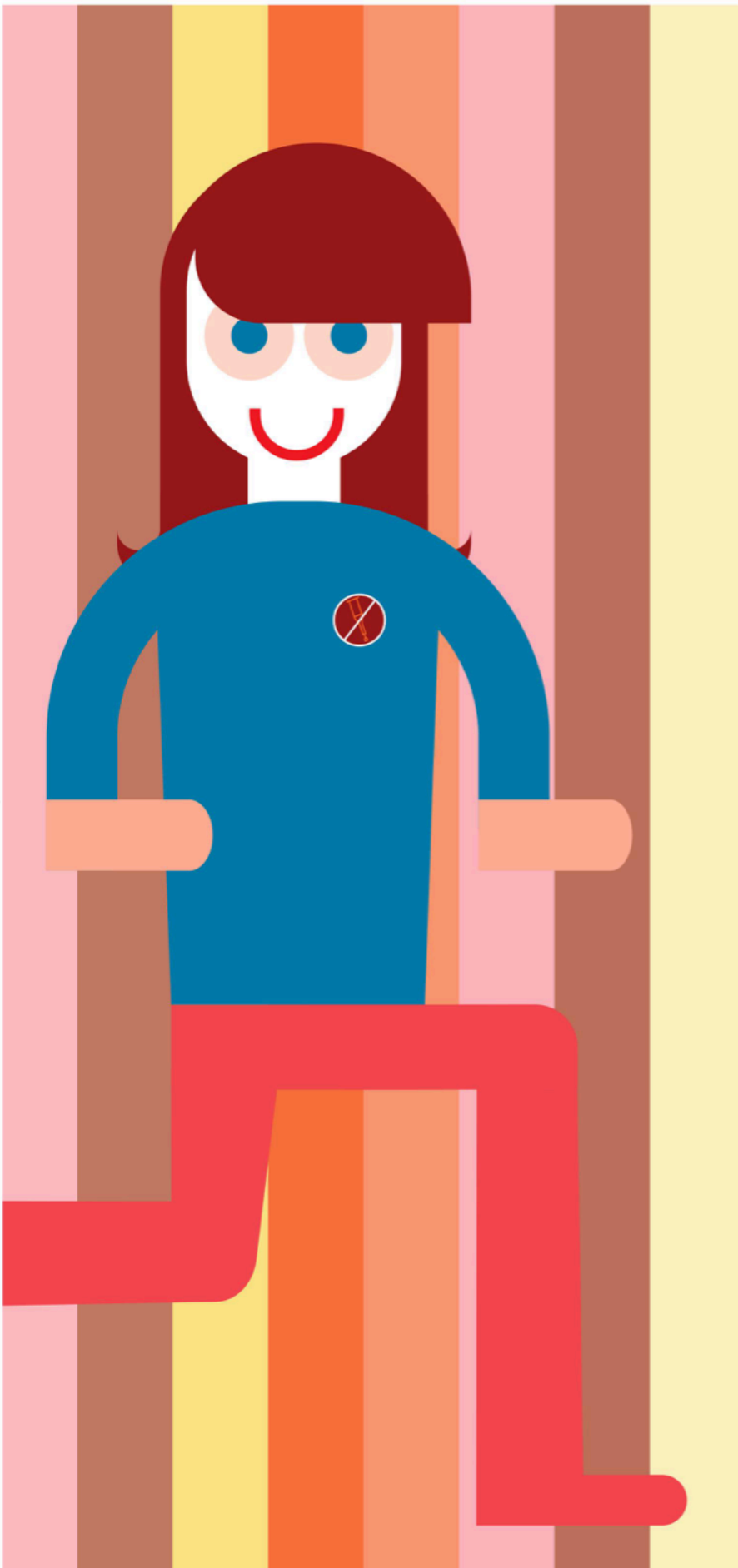
If you have a more serious injury and you don't listen to your body, and take the time off from running you desperately need, you may end up doubling the time you are forced to take out. "Running through an injury can be disastrous, and instead of taking a few weeks off to heal, you may end up taking months off."

With longer-term injuries you need to use the time to sit back and think about your life balance.



Fiona during the Venice Marathon

"WHEN YOUR INJURY HAS HEALED, BE SMART WITH YOUR TRAINING AND RACING SCHEDULE SO YOU COME BACK STRONGER THAN BEFORE"



It can be time to ask yourself: 'Am I happy with my life, and my training/work/family balance?' "For some, not being able to run leaves a big gap in their life, making the sense of grief they experience seem even greater," Kerry says. "It can expose what is missing in your life. If you dedicate a lot of your life to training, maybe you haven't had the time to see your family, partner, or friends. Use this time to be with the people who are important to you."

CHANNEL YOUR FRUSTRATION

Lashing out on others as the negative feelings build isn't going to help you cope with injury time. How can you best deal with feelings of frustration?

"I find it really helpful to keep a mood and well-being diary," says Kim. "Each day write down how you are feeling, what is frustrating you and how you can overcome it. This helps you focus on finding things that are going well, yet also highlights where the problems are that may need help and support."

Building a vision board of races, people and places that inspire and motivate us is really useful to focus the mind. "Each week choose a quote or photo, or even just a word as your focus – confident, courage, healing, strong, belief – whatever you need to feel OK," says Kim.

Try to be grateful for what you do have in your life. "By shifting your perspective from a 'victim-like' mode of feeling sorry for yourself due to the injury, to a perspective of all the good things you do have in your life and what you can do helps you to be more positive," says Midgie.

Even though it may seem that everything has gone wrong, most of us can replace our dreams. "Focus on the positives!" says Kerry. "Less washing, lower food bills and no 3pm slump when you just don't know how you're going to keep going until tea time, let alone bed time!"

COME BACK STRONGER

When your injury has healed, be smart with your training and racing schedule so you come back stronger than before. "Use this time to think about improving your strength, speed and confidence, immunity and rest, so you come back a wiser, stronger, happier athlete," advises Kim.

"At 57 I know I am going to have to come to terms with my body not doing what I want more and more," says Fiona. "However, I am going to go down running! Don't let injury stop you; keep fit with yoga, swimming or walking. Let your body heal so that you can enjoy the wonderful feeling of clocking up the miles, because it really doesn't get better than that." ■

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