



The Ultimate Gamer Wellbeing Guide

Introduction

The eSports industry has exploded. Valued at over \$1.5 billion, with 180 professional teams and millions of players worldwide, it's highly likely that everyone either knows a gamer, or is one themselves. And it's not just Gen X'ers and Millennials who game. 1/3 of gamers are over the age of 34 and almost 1/2 of all gamers are parents themselves! Gaming has infiltrated every generation, meaning that there's never been a more pertinent time to focus on the health and wellbeing of gamers as the industry continues to grow.

This is a field that's been lacking. From hobby gamers to professionals, gamers are widely reporting physical ailments, low nutrition and a lack of understanding and support when it comes to looking after their minds and bodies. If even the players at the top aren't getting what they need, it's time something is done about it!

We want to help. With the assistance of experts across the fields of nutrition, psychology, physiotherapy and sports and fitness, we've put together this fully comprehensive wellbeing guide for gamers. It includes top tips and advice on everything from diet and nutrition, to exercise and movement, to mental wellbeing. This is the first time all this advice has been put in one place, and it's completely free.

So, whether you're a gamer who's wanting to look take better care of themselves, you're looking to take the next step up in your gaming career and want to find out how you can advance to the next level or you're the parent or loved one of a gamer who's in need of some health advice, you've come to the right place.



Nutrition



With gamers spending anywhere from 2-15 hrs per day playing (and professional players potentially even longer), it may come as no surprise that many gamers struggle to find time to cook nutritionally balanced, healthy meals. Ensuring you're eating 3 meals a day using whole ingredients and fresh fruit and vegetables is crucial for performance.

We consulted nutritionist **Alejandra McCall, a registered dietician in Personalised Nutrition & Lifestyle Medicine**, on exactly what gamers need in order to stay adequately fuelled.



As with all athletes, all food groups are important. eSports players can spend very long hours concentrated on a game, and their brain and body need to be properly fuelled. Athletes need a good ratio of complex carbohydrates, lean protein and healthy fats, and for eSports athletes it's no different. The ratio of each macronutrient should be adjusted to the age and also to the physical activity each eSports athlete will have outside training for games and tournaments.

Alejandra McCall - Dietician

A diet that provides plenty for fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, pulses and/or animal protein, nuts and seeds are very important for the normal function of the brain and also to remain sharp during long hours.



Hydration

Let's face it, we can all be guilty of not drinking enough water from time to time, especially if you're absorbed by your favourite game and forget to get your H2O fix! However, hydration is needed to maintain focus, energy and high performance in eSports. Alejandra says that, despite the plethora of available alternatives, water is still the best thing to drink in order to stay at the top of your game.

“ In gaming, hydration, as in any sport, is key to maintaining peak performance. Dehydration has been found to drastically impair cognitive performance, inhibiting vigilance (keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties), working memory, attention and motor coordination– all of which are vital for optimal gaming performance over extended periods of time! The problem is, when needing to maintain focus, gamers often resort to high quantities of caffeine-based drinks such as coffee, nootropics and energy drinks.

Alejandra McCall - Dietician

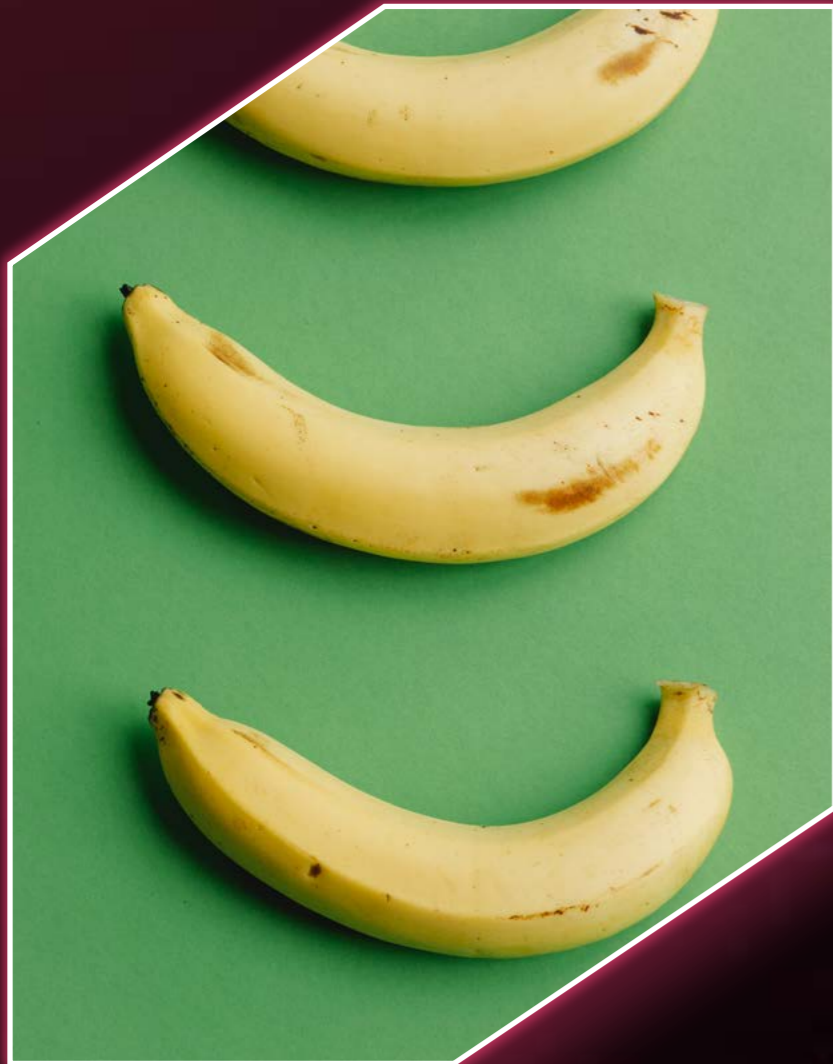


We also spoke to **Ella Rauen-Prestes, Nutritionist from Stanford University School of Medicine and founder of Fitbakes**, to get her top tips on staying hydrated. She recommends mixing your water up with different flavours to make it a bit easier to drink.



“Make your water more palatable with pieces of fruit or herbs in it, such as strawberries and basil, or rosemary and lemon.” She also recommends aiming for snacks and ingredients with a high water content as another way to stay hydrated, “On breaks gamers should be encouraged to eat foods that are high in water along with their meal. Some examples are cucumber, watermelon, oranges, tomatoes, spinach and broccoli.”

Ellen Rauen Prestes- Nutritionist and founder of Fitbakes



Snacks and meals

A [study](#) conducted by the University of New Hampshire surveyed over 1,700 male college students and found that those who play video games tend to have poorer eating habits compared to those who don't. They found that gamers consume more saturated fat and sodium than non-gamers, indicating a high consumption of salty snacks. They also consumed fewer fruit and vegetables. A similar study conducted across male and female gamers in the US, Western Europe and APAC found that salty snacks are the most popular types of snacks for gamers across all 3 regions, particularly amongst female players.

We asked Ella for her advice on how gamers can make sure their snacking habits are nutritionally balanced and benefitting their play. She recommends prepping snacks in advance to avoid reaching for the nearest salty treat.

“ Prep your meals and snacks in advance, so when you need to grab something quickly not to miss out on the game you can still get good nutrition. Replacement meals like complete shakes could also be useful.

Ella Rauen Prestes- Nutritionist and founder of Fitbakes



To get the lowdown on the best snacks to aid performance, we also spoke to **Ben Coomber, nutritionist (BSc, CISSN) and owner of Awesome Supplements**. He agreed with Ella, saying

“Moderation when it comes to sugary snacks and fatty processed foods is key, by all means have a packet of crisps but don't go and finish that whole multipack just because you're a little bit peckish. Instead go and make a sandwich or something that will fill you up more effectively and has some much more nutritional values.

Fruits are a great snack, as they'll fill a hole if you're slightly hungry, and contain natural sugars that will give you an energy boost without spiking your insulin in the same way a sugary snack or drink would. They also have loads of vitamins and fibre as well

Ben Coomber - nutritionist (BSc, CISSN), educator, speaker, writer and owner of Awesome Supplements

If you can't get around to cooking, they both recommend making sure your snacks and convenience foods have protein, complex carbs, fibre, vegetables and good fats.



Supplements

Although your meals and snacks should be providing you with all the essentials, sometimes it can help to have a little boost from vitamin supplements. These can help with anything from resetting a dietary imbalance to lack of exposure to natural light.

“As gamers and eSports players are likely to spend long periods of time inside, a vitamin D supplement is advisable. Vitamin D is important for strong bones and teeth, healthy hair and skin, and a strong immune system. Most people get vitamin D from sunlight so if you’re indoors a lot it is a good idea to supplement. Supplements in general can be useful as many people lack certain micronutrients in their diet that are important for both your bodily function and your cognitive function, so things like iron, omega-3, and zinc supplements may be advisable”

Ben Coomber - nutritionist (BSc, CISSN), educator, speaker, writer and owner of Awesome Supplements

Supplements can help in tackling deficiencies related to lack of light exposure and a poorly balanced diet, but be careful of over-the-counter supplements and ergogenic aids for mental performance. There are thousands out there that will claim to have superpowers with little scientific evidence behind them. If you want to aid brain functions and sharpen your reaction times, a fish oil supplement should suffice

The Complete Gamer Shopping List

*These should only be drunk on occasion and not as a regular replacement. Having a well-balanced, varied diet is the best way to stay on top of your game.



Bananas

They are rich in potassium which aids blood flow to the brain and reduces brain fog



Spinach and red peppers

Easily digestible and low gas vegetables, especially when cooked. Together, they contain fibre, vitamins, omega 3's and calcium



Carrots

Can be eaten raw and help add in a few more vitamins and fibre



Complete meal shakes*

Provide a good amount of nutrients for when you're doing an all-day session and don't have time to cook a meal



Whole grain breads and cereals

Slow release carbohydrates that won't give you a blood sugar spike and make you sluggish



Turmeric, pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate and nuts

Good for focus and a great alternative to caffeine and energy drinks



Nut butters

Good nutrition, full of vitamins, and will keep you going through long gaming sessions



Popcorn, beans, nuts, berries and dark chocolate

Full of good fats and high fibre

Physical health



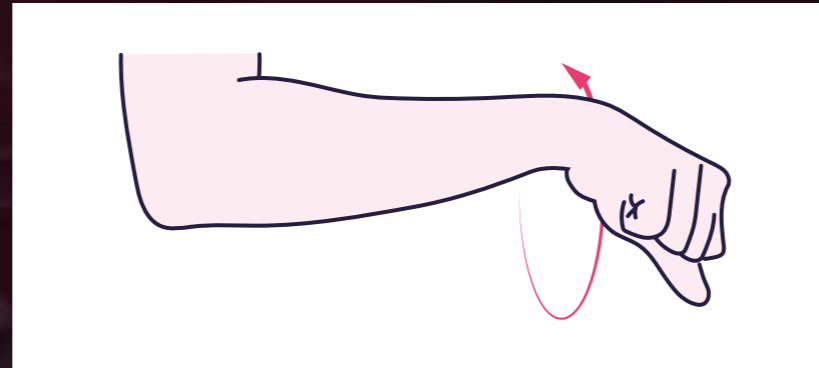
We all know the physical stereotype of a gamer- hunched over, bleary-eyed, with aches and pains caused by quick-fire game play and sustained periods of sitting down. Although this stereotype is outdated and inaccurate in many ways, gamers have repeatedly reported being affected by particular ailments. To find out what's happening on the ground, we took to popular forums **Reddit** and **Quora** to find out the ailments frequently experienced by hobby gamers and professionals alike. The most commonly-reported were:

- Back pain
- Nausea and fatigue- When I was younger and had way more free time, there were some days where I'd play games for like 16 hours straight. Without a doubt, every time I did that I'd be feeling sick and weak the entire next day.
- Headaches and shoulder pain- "I get headaches (or sometimes shoulder pain) caused by neck strain after long gaming sessions. While part of it comes from the way I like to sit, it is also due to a sub-par monitor setup."
- Eye fatigue

Although these can be difficult and painful, and can get in the way of top game play, they can be fixed with a few simple daily movements that can be easily incorporated into your gaming routine. We consulted **eSports Physical Therapist Dr. Caitlin McGee** to find out the physical problems that she and her team frequently see and treat, and how to combat them.

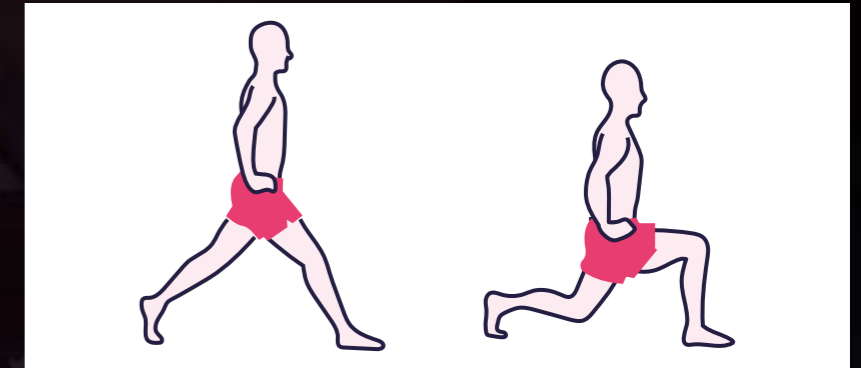
Movement guide

If you're looking for some moves you can do to mitigate stiffness, injury and pain, below are a few simple exercises Caitlin recommends a few simple movements Caitlin recommends doing during and after game-play to make sure you stay limber, supported and pain-free. No matter whether you use a laptop, PC or gaming console, these tips will help you stay at the top of your game."



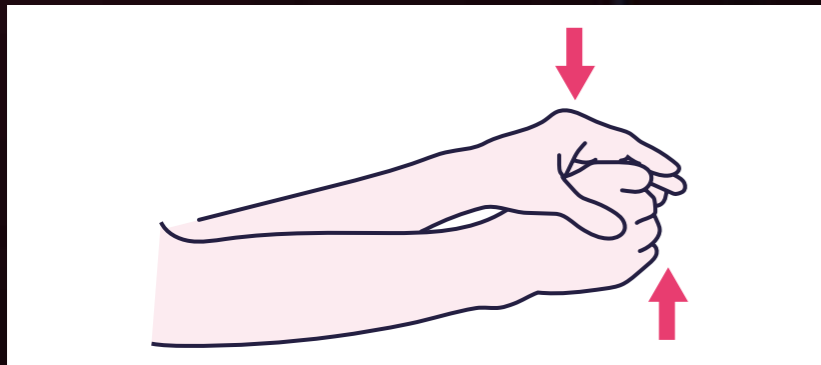
Wrist circles

This works on the mobility of your wrists, allowing you to move through the full range of motion more easily while you're gaming.



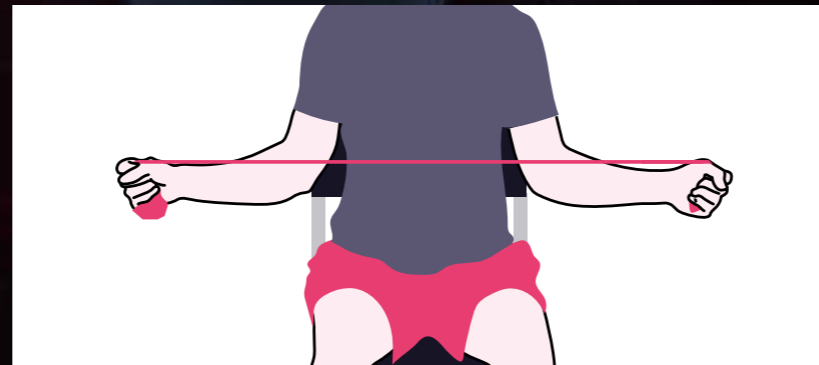
Standing lunge

When you spend a lot of time sitting, your hip flexors can become tight. Standing lunge stretches help to reduce that, which decreases stress at the hips and low back.



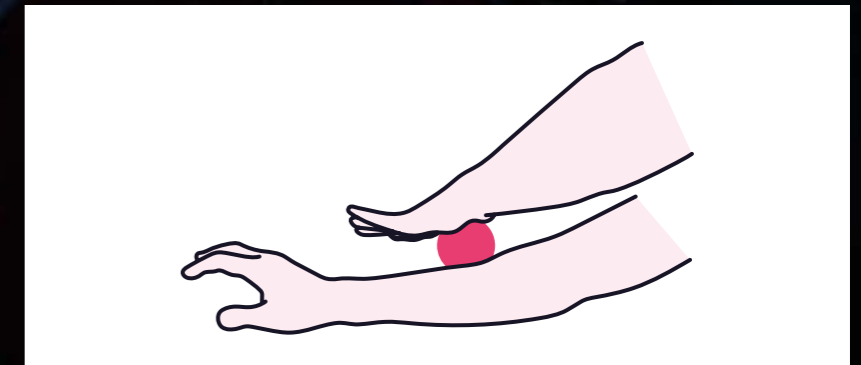
Isometric wrist exercises

Great for improving strength and endurance, with the bonus of having a proven effect of reducing pain from tendinopathies.



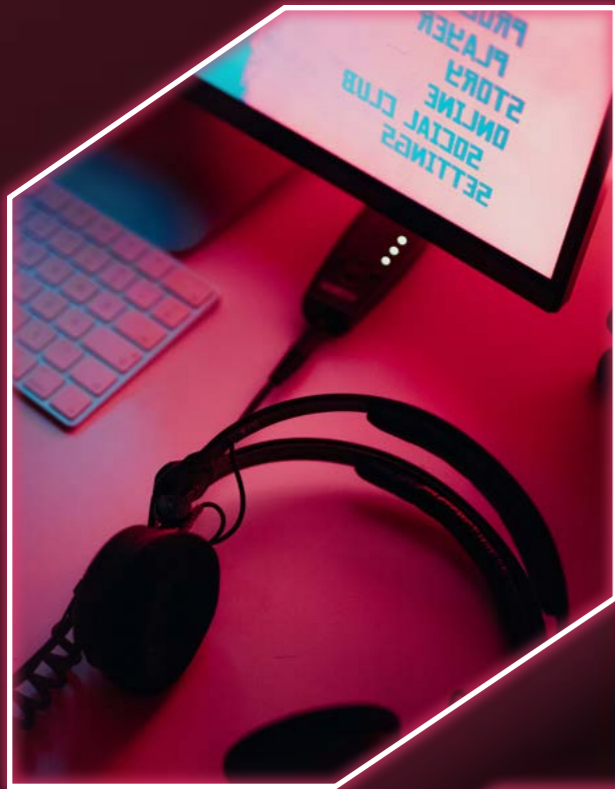
Scapular retraction with external rotation

it prompts you to sit with good posture and strengthens muscles which control your upper back posture/shoulder stability



Forearm massage with a tennis ball or a water bottle!

It can be hard on your wrist to do the "typical" hand up/hand down wrist stretches if you're more flexible, even when you're tight.



The winning set-up

It's not just movements during play that can affect your susceptibility to injury. Caitlin says that your gaming set up can play a crucial role, too.

“ While you're gaming, you want to make sure that you've got a comfortable, neutral posture and then build your setup around that. Strain and injuries are functions of load over time. Some aspects of load can't be decreased—we can't make a game play differently, or make the game shorter, or change (some) movements or keybinds.

What we can decrease when it comes to load is often external peripherals, like using a split keyboard at a slight angle to allow the wrist to remain in a neutral position or like adjusting a seat so that a player's arms are supported and they don't have to use postural/shoulder muscles to stabilize as much. Most importantly, your setup should allow you to move easily. Movement and changing position is better than any one posture. An easy way of remembering it is “your best posture is your next posture.”

Caitlin McGee - eSports Physical Therapist

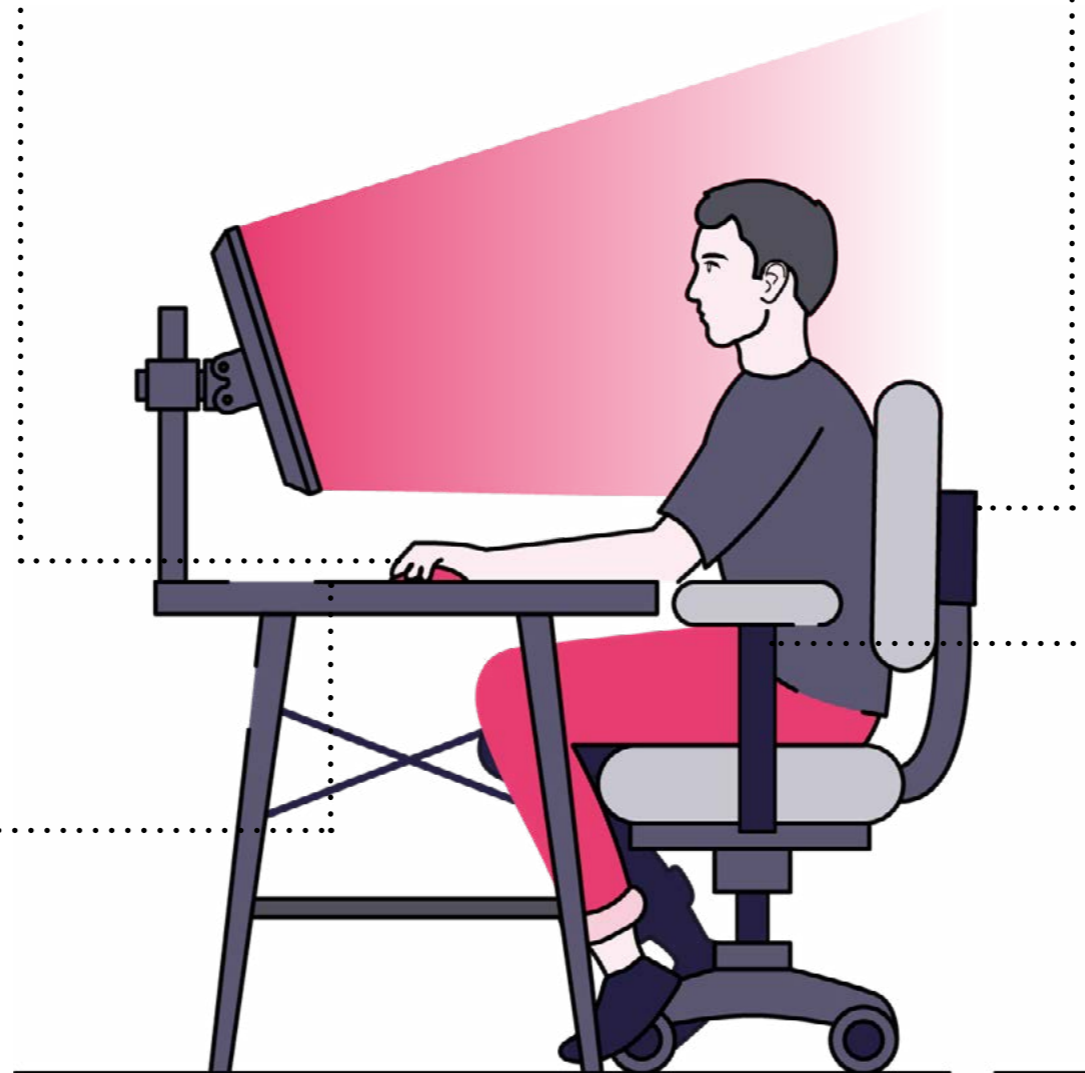
The winning set-up

Keyboard rest

Resting your wrist on the edge of your desk puts pressure directly on your carpal tunnel where it's not covered by anything more than skin and some connective tissue. Rest the heel of your hand on either a keyboard rest or on your desk itself, because it's more cushioned by bone and muscle.

Keyboard

Turning your keyboard 90 degrees away from you means you have to internally rotate your shoulder and tilt your wrist to the side. This puts more pressure on your shoulder and on the thumb side of your wrist. Use a split keyboard at a slight angle to allow the wrist to remain in a neutral position.



Back rest

People with rounded, slouched postures put a lot of strain on their lower backs directly, and also indirectly put strain on their necks and upper backs. That can lead to everything from tension headaches to trigger points to, potentially, more serious issues like thoracic outlet syndrome.

Arm Rests

Not using your armrests or having them too low results in one of two things: either you have to slouch to reach the low armrests or you have to use your neck, shoulder, upper back muscles, and forearm muscles to keep your arms stable while you play. That puts unnecessary fatigue and strain in those muscles.

Away from the game

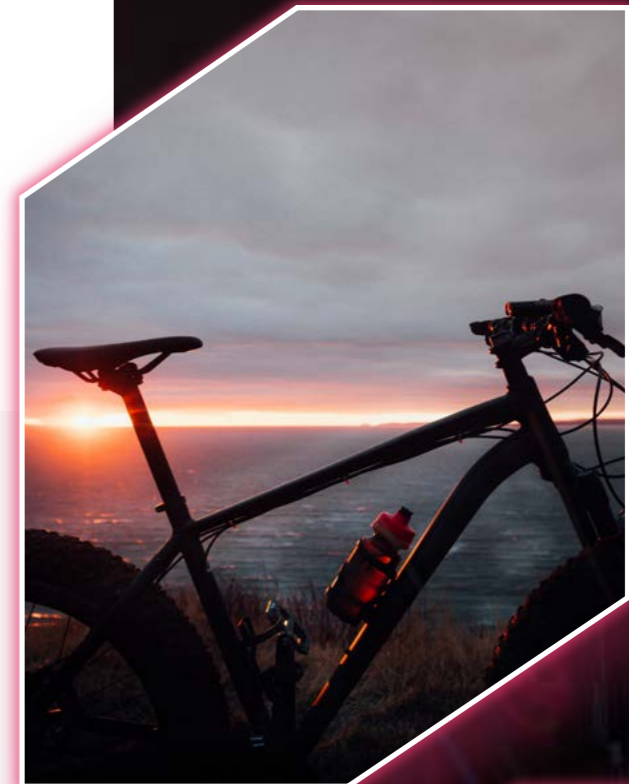
But what about when you're not gaming? Caitlin claims that taking care of your health outside of game-time is just as important for physical performance as during.

“ When you're not gaming, it's important to consider your nutrition, sleep, and hydration, all of which affect the capacity of your muscles to withstand stress. It's also important to engage in some regular amount of exercise, specifically exercises designed to address the joints, muscles, and tendons most affected by gaming.

The best possible exercise is whatever one you'll do consistently. Seriously. The most “optimal” workout is the one that you'll stick with. Start slowly with lower-impact exercises like walking, and add more as you're capable of doing it. Your exercise should incorporate a mix of mobility, resistance/strength exercises, and cardio.

If you're just starting out, the top three things I'd recommend are **walking**, **planks** for core and upper body strength, and **squats**. Listen to your body. It's a lot easier to add more work because you did too little than it is to recover from over-doing it and exhausting your body.

Caitlin McGee - eSports Physical Therapist



Mental health



Like other sports, gaming requires focus, commitment and time if you want to go pro. This can put a strain on your mental health as well as your physical health and, unlike professional sports players, psychological advice isn't always offered to eSports players. Even if your sights aren't set on playing at a professional level, high levels of screen time can have a detrimental effect on your motivation levels, mood and overall psychological wellbeing, so it's important to look after yourself!

A report published in 2017 about the mindset of winning players and teams in Esports found that up to 50% of performance improvement links to mental preparedness and a player's state of mind. When your mind is healthy, your game can improve significantly!

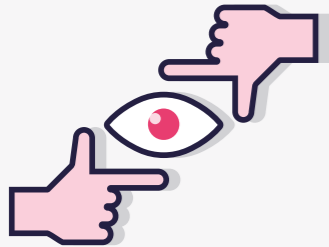
We teamed up with **Chris Shambrook, Performance Psychology Expert and Director at PlanetK2.com**, to get the lowdown on how to approach gaming like a physical sport and look after your mind before, during and after the game.



- Build a robust confidence by constantly seeking the evidence that you've got everything in place to that builds your ability to perform (physically, technically, tactically, mentally, support wise). Be great at drawing on the support of experts who can help you get better. Your attitude towards the people who can help you and how you seek to benefit from their expertise could be a superpower for you.
- Always enjoy the chance to refine your recipe of how you like to think (communicate with yourself) and how you like to feel (emotions) so you've always got a great psychological platform from which to play. Whenever you compete, give yourself the challenge of making the most of the version of yourself that you are on the day. Getting 100% out of the talent available on any day is the ultimate performance skill.
- Make sure you're always connected to why you love to play! Never lose sight of what it means to you simply to enjoy the games, irrespective of scores, medals, accolades. If you can always play simply for the love of what you're doing, you'll be in great shape.

Chris Shambrook, Performance Psychology Expert and Director at PlanetK2.com

Here are 5 of Chris's essential tips to make sure you're looking after yourself, enjoying your play and winning the mental health game:



1. Keep perspective

It's important you know why you're a great person beyond the game. When any performer is relying on success in a sport to define how they feel about themselves as a person, pressures and unhealthy thinking can become a problem. Use people around you to help you maintain a balanced view of yourself as a person, beyond the game.



2. Mental rest and recovery

If you're not getting downtime and switching off from gaming, then mental fatigue can really build up. So, blend in some psychological self-care in your programme. Whether you choose to try out different types of meditation, or you make sure you enjoy a variety of activities that stimulate your brain in different ways, the aim is to give your mind some contrast and recovery.



3. Self-compassion

This is probably the most important wellbeing skill to develop. You need to ensure you're getting as great at being kind to yourself as you are at your essential gaming skills.



4. Understand your personality

The most balanced performers usually have a really high level of self-awareness AND self-acceptance. If you can really tune into who and how you are and learn to work with that, then you're more likely to have a strong wellbeing foundation.



5. You can choose to play terribly!!

We get so hung up on trying to play the ideal game without any faults, that we lose sight of the fact that we can choose to play really badly at any time we want. Remembering that usually removes some of the unhelpful responses that a 'fear of failure' can bring about.

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