

## Training update

With 4 weeks to go, you should be halfway through your training plan and seeing some real progress with your preparations for Wheels for Change. As important as preparing yourself physically for the event is, it is also really important to prepare yourself mentally. This month we focus on Mindfulness techniques to help support you succeed in completing your challenge.

## Mindfulness

Participation in any endurance event requires extensive training and careful preparation to be physically fit. It is also important to mentally prepare. How often do you find as the day of the event approaches or indeed while on the starting line, the inner voice, the “chatter” in the head gets started. It almost seems to have a role to undermine you “Are you sure you have done enough training?”, “Can you really do this?”, “Remember what happened last time”. Does this sound familiar? Physiologically, this “chatter” re-running previous errors or jumping ahead to potential failures, elicits a stress response and contributes to anxiety, which is detrimental to performance. Emotions arising directly impact on behaviour, we are less able to make good decisions and it is difficult to maintain perspective and focus.

*“Our research indicates that heightened cognitive anxiety, brought on by the competitive scenario, really does affect performance abilities in physically active people” - Dr Michael Duncan, Coventry University, 2014*

Increasingly, sports psychologists, trainers and athletes are using mindfulness to mentally prepare and improve performance. Mindfulness training changes the brain; it improves the ability to stay focused and avoid distractions, as well as increasing the ability to be in the “zone”. It deepens the mind-body connection, which increases our ability to recognise and act on physiological signals from the body, such as altered breathing or muscle tension. We are more aware of thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them and so we can better manage stress and anxiety.

*“Mindfulness practice with athletes...helps reduce anxiety and nerves before playing” - Dr Harbinder Sandhu, Health Psychologist Warwick University, 2015*

Mindfulness, which can be considered as complete engagement in the present moment without judging or fantasising, is cultivated by practising formal mindfulness meditation. A short practice, mindfulness of the sensations of breathing, is attached if you wish to try.

Simple mindfulness techniques can also be used to create a calm and alert state of mind prior to competing. You might like to try this one:

### Learn to **FOCUS**

- F** Feet on the floor, grounding yourself
- O** Observe how you are feeling, aware of thoughts & emotions arising, acknowledge them by perhaps naming them & let go
- C** Concentrate on being fully present in this moment, not the past or future
- U** Use your breath to focus, simply observing the sensations of breathing
- S** Stay with the breath, sensations of breathing, to refocus & calm the mind

Contributed by Dr Gail E Davies; MindLab Co-Founder. MindLab are Nuffield Health’s official Mindfulness partner.