

# **COACHING THE FEMALE ATHLETE**

**HELEN CLITHEROE**

# ACHIEVEMENTS

- Commonwealth Bronze medal 1500m
- European Indoor Gold medal 3000m
- Double Olympian
- 53 GB representative honours
- Competed at 5 Commonwealth Games
- Competed at 5 World athletics championships and 4 European champs
- World and euro indoor champs.
- Competed at 8 world cross country and 9 European cross country championships
- Held British Record for 3000m steeplechase 2008-2012
- Captained the England commonwealth team and GB track and field team.

## PERSONAL BESTS

1500m 4.01.10  
3000m 8.39.9  
3000m s/c 9.29  
5000m 15.06.75  
10000m 32.11.29  
10k 31.45  
HM 70.57



# COACHING

## CURRENTLY

ASSISTANT COACH AT LEEDS HUB  
STEEPLECHASE COORDINATOR EA

## EXPERIENCE:

GB TEAM COACH AT WORLD & EUROPEAN XC  
ENGLAND ENDURANCE COACH - COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2018  
GB JUNIOR COACH - EUROPEAN TRACK CHAMPS  
GB COACH - WORLD HALF MARATHON  
GB COACH EUROPEAN 10000M



# MY ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

- CLUB ATHLETICS SINCE AGE 11
- COUNTY LEVEL ATHLETE
- ENGLISH SCHOOLS
- LATE DEVELOPER - PLATEAU
- FIRST GB VEST AGED 24
- CONSISTENCY
- TRACK XC ROAD
- COACHES - JERRY HARRIES, JOHN NUTTALL



Fun running aged 10



English schools Champs



European Indoors Gold

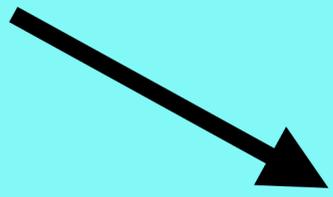


**Transition from club runner to GB international  
Playing the long game!**

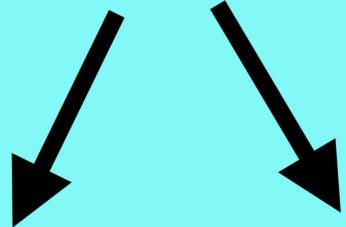
# **COACHING THE INDIVIDUAL**

# FEMALE ATHLETE CHALLENGES

Puberty



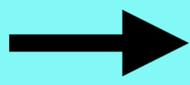
Periods



Regular   Irregular



Loss of period

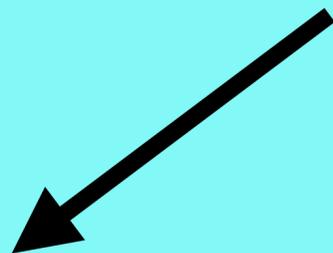


Body shape



Eating Psychology

Exercise Obsession



**RED-S**



# RED-S

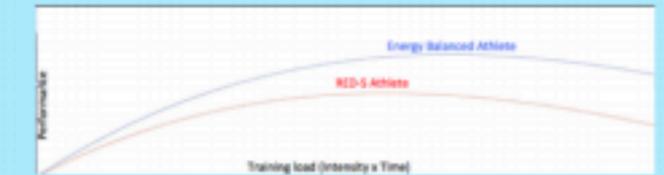
## Relative energy deficiency in sport

### What is it?

A condition of energy deficiency with adverse effects on all bodily systems, which can seriously compromise long term health and performance. It affects both **male & female** athletes and dancers who do not fuel adequately, either intentionally or unintentionally.

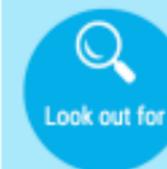
### Why it matters so much

1. Growth and development
2. Health and wellbeing
3. Performance



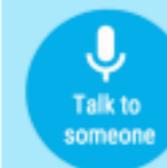
Suboptimal performance as result of RED-S (Keay, BJSM 2017)

### What to do?



Look out for

- Perfectionist tendencies
- Disordered/restricted eating
- Frequent injury/niggles
- Illness
- Menstrual dysfunction in females



Talk to someone

- Are you...
- Overtraining?
  - Fuelling adequately?
  - Having regular rest days?



Seek medical help

- GP needs to rule out other medical conditions
- GP can refer on to specialist RED-S services



Read more at...



Scan me



Scan me

Health4Performance

### Be aware that



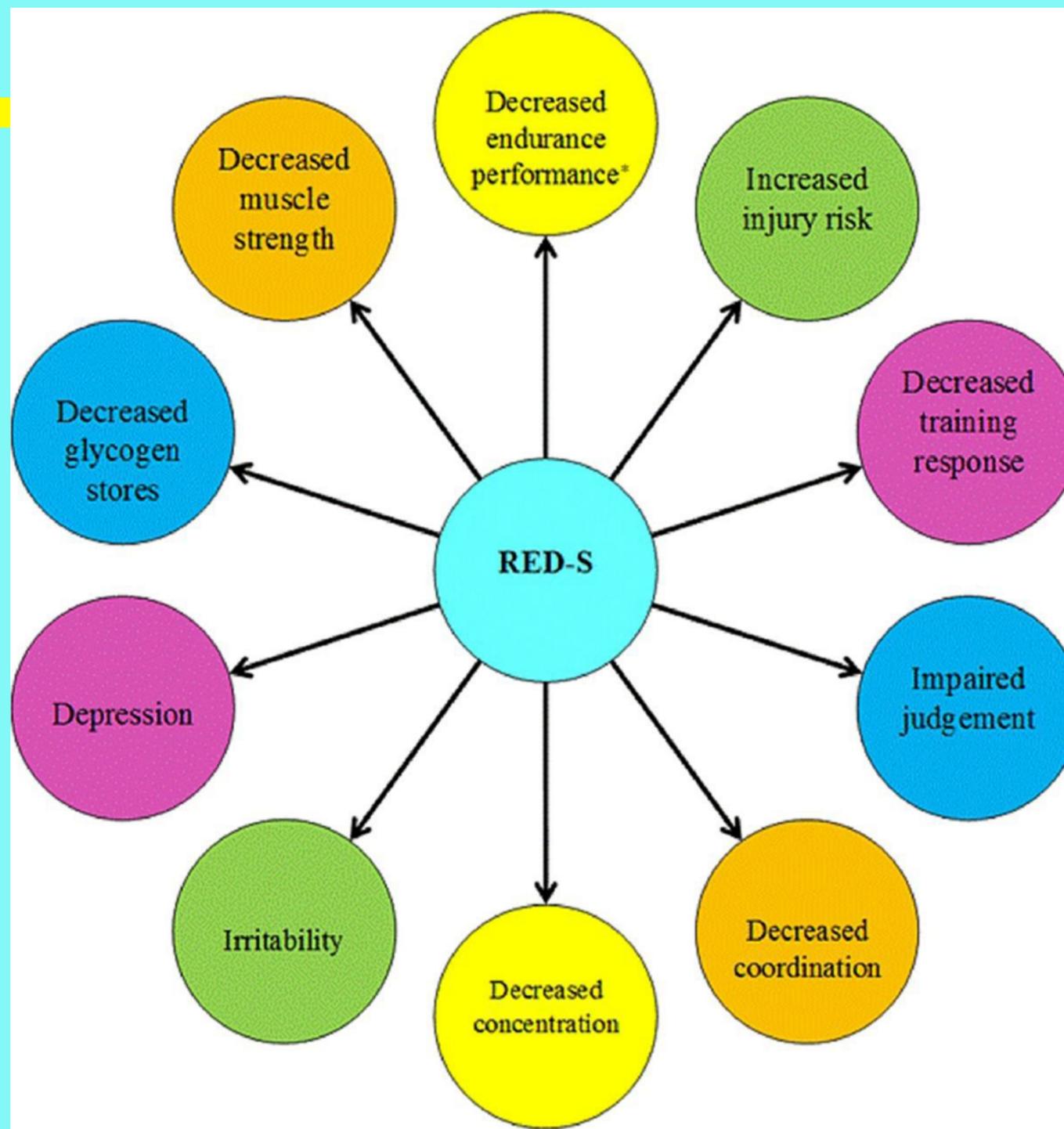
20%

higher prevalence of disordered eating in athletes versus non athletes (BJSEM 2016)

### The female athlete

- Regular menstrual cycle is a barometer of hormone health
- Not starting periods by age 16 or not having periods for >6 months requires medical investigation
- Oral contraceptive pill (OCP) can **mask** hormonal problems without providing bone protection or addressing underlying cause
- OCP as a contraceptive choice needs to be an informed decision by the athlete

Functional Hypothalamic Amenorrhoea: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline (Gordon et al, Journal of clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism 2017)



The IOC relative energy deficiency in sport clinical assessment tool (RED-S CAT) **FREE**

- Margo Mountjoy<sup>1</sup>, Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen<sup>2</sup>, Louise Burke<sup>3</sup>, Susan Carter<sup>4</sup>, Naama Constantini<sup>5</sup>, Constance Lebrun<sup>6</sup>, Nanna Meyer<sup>7</sup>, Roberta Sherman<sup>8</sup>, Kathrin Steffen<sup>2,9</sup>, Richard Budgett<sup>9</sup>, Arne Ljungqvist<sup>9</sup>, Kathryn Ackerman<sup>10</sup>
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# INJURY RISK

Anecdotaly

Higher risk of :

Stress fractures- bone issues

Shin Splints- (medial tibial stress syndrome)

Runners Knee (Patellfemoral pain)



Adapting to changes post puberty and  
growth spurts

Importance of S & C

Nutrition

Recovery



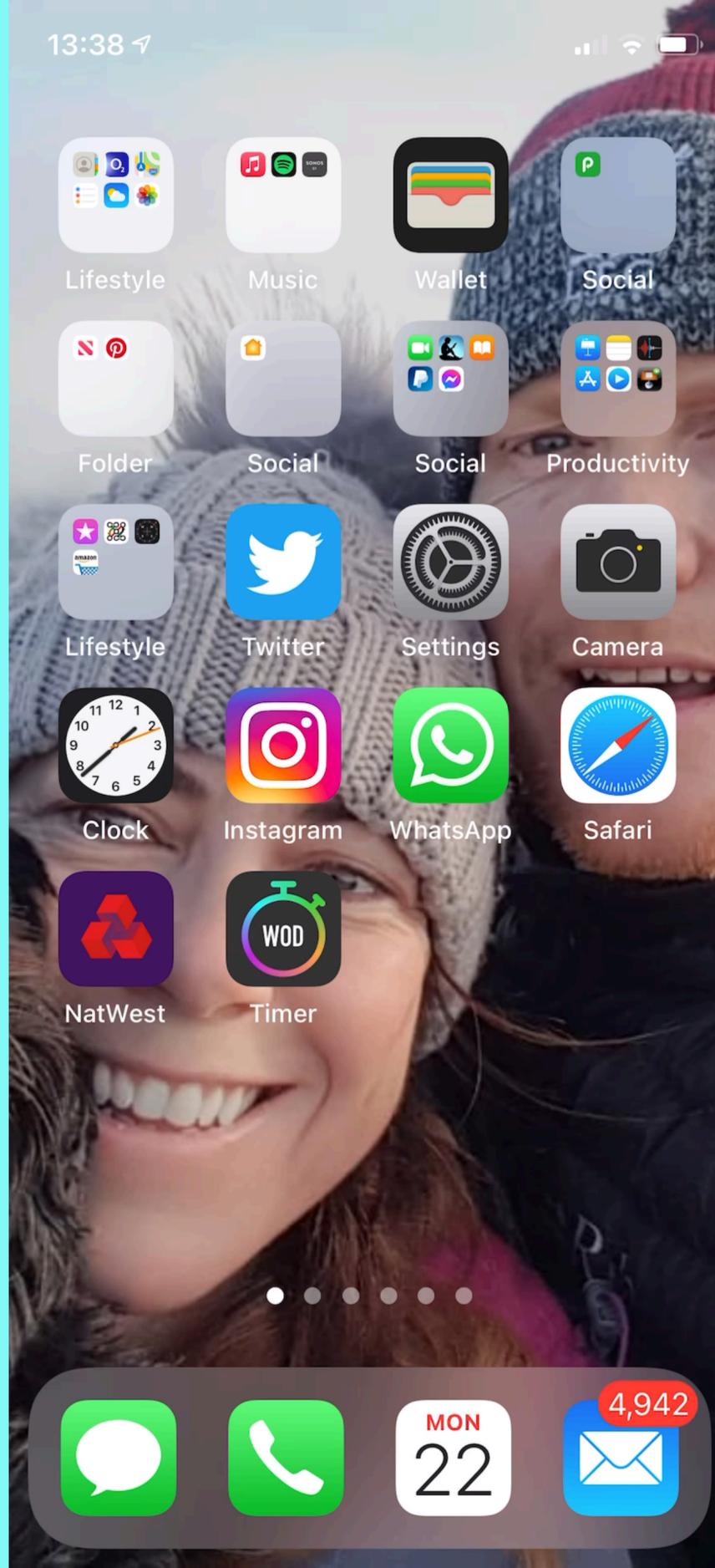
**A lot of athletes do have a healthy regular cycle !**

**HOW DO WE DEAL WITH IT ?**

- **PERIOD TRACKING**

- **COMMUNICATING WITH COACH**

- **CONTRACEPTION**



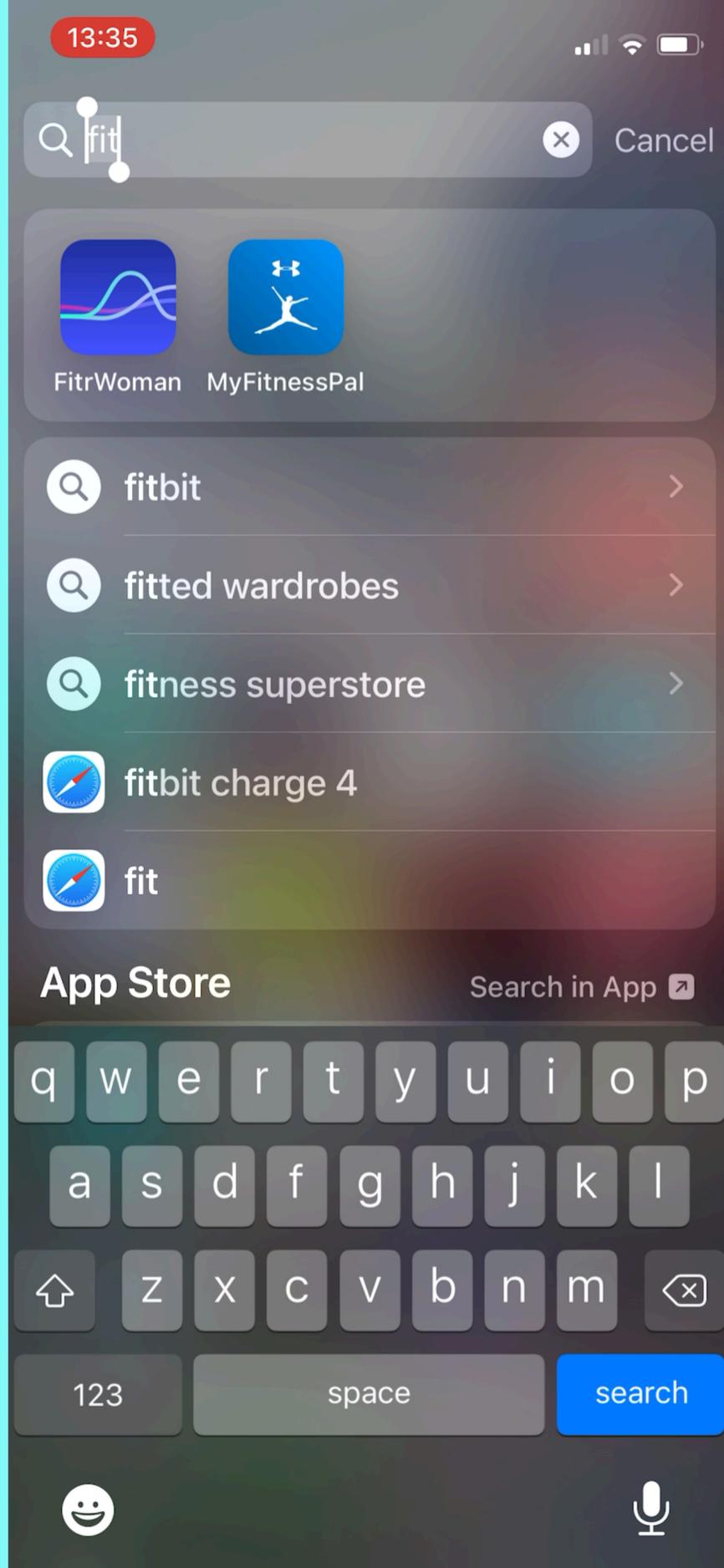
**GARMIN CONNECT**



**COACH HAS ACCESS TO ATHLETE ACCOUNT**

↓  
**Communicate  
with coach**

↓  
**Diary/Training Peaks**



**FitRWoman app**

# BODY IMAGE

HOW AN ATHLETE PERCEIVES THEMSELVES

- Endurance athletes are different sizes and shapes
- No typical body shape- especially in middle distance
- Language used
- SOCIAL MEDIA

The reaction to this race



**britishathletics** "In 2011, 2012, there was a lot of press leading into the home Olympics. I got a lot of criticism about the way I looked, especially around my body weight. At one point, if you Googled my name, one of the top links just said "Holly Bleasdale fat".

There were a lot of people saying how I didn't look like the other athletes, so I was clearly never going to make it. When I jumped to third all-time ever in the world, I was still branded as overweight, and with too much puppy fat and I'm like 'I just jumped the third highest ever!' If that doesn't show you that what you look like from the outside doesn't matter, then I don't know what does, but as a 20 year old it's hard to truly believe this when it's all everyone is talking about.

I'm not one of these people who can say "I don't care what people think of me". I do care. It's actually created a lot of challenges for me throughout my life in terms of mental health. And that's another reason why I try to promote and raise awareness for that in younger athletes. I think it's even worse now for them with the ease of criticism through the likes of Instagram and Twitter. It really wasn't a thing when I was that young, and I dread to think what I would have been thinking and looking at had it been around then.

Send message



I just find it so sad when I've had, you know, 11, 12 year old girls come up to me and say "I want to quit because I don't look good and I don't want to be in a crop top on TV".

And I can relate to that. The reason, the sole reason, why I wear a onesie now is because of the issues I had as a younger athlete with body image. There's no way I'll ever show my stomach on TV. No way. There's no reason why I shouldn't, but it's driven from the challenges that I had.

I just want more girls, especially the youngsters involved in sport, to be supported through the challenges that I have. There are so many varied body types and I don't think that's celebrated enough. There is an athletics event for each and every one of our younger generation no matter what size or shape they are, and they should all be celebrated, never put down."

[@hollypv](#) | [#PersonalBest](#)

Send message



## Holly Bradshaw Speaking out about body image the effects of other people's opinion and the impact it can have

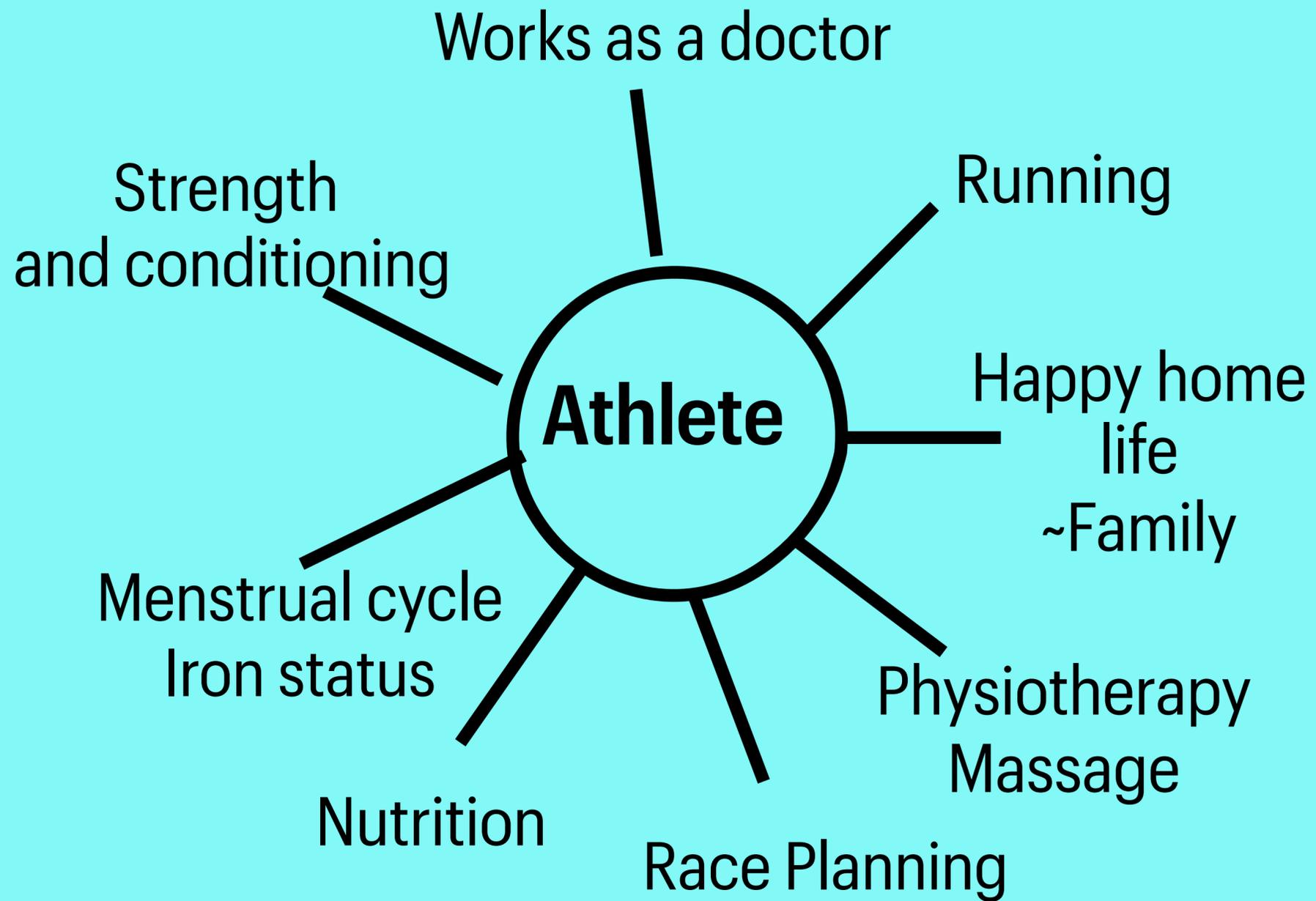


- **We need to think about our language**
- **Having open communication**
- **Do we know how our athletes are feeling ?**
- **Do we consider mental health of athletes**

# EMOTIONAL NEEDS

- Communication is key
- How do we communicate - agree a method
- Consideration to bring in a neutral party
- Life balance & Life management
- Stressors for the athlete -work, education, injury, performance
- A happy athlete is more likely to perform well





# USEFUL WEBSITES & PODCASTS

[www.nickykeayfitness.com](http://www.nickykeayfitness.com)

[www.health4performance.co.uk](http://www.health4performance.co.uk)

[www.reneemcgregor.com](http://www.reneemcgregor.com)

[www.trainbrave.org](http://www.trainbrave.org)

**FEMALE ATHLETE PODCAST- excellent**

**Off Track Podcast**

**Trent Stellingwerff**

**Gareth Sandford**



**WHAT DO YOU DO DIFFERENTLY WHEN  
COACHING FEMALES COMPARED TO MALES?**



**'I think being conscious of, and taking an interest in them as a person, not just an athlete.  
Think it creates a stronger trust and buy in with a female athlete.'**

**'The answer for me its a partnership (coach/athlete) the methods of coaching them is about their personality & the smaller training tweaks about what they respond to individually so no major difference there.**

**I suppose as a coach we sometimes comparing previous responses (good and bad) of similar athletes in relation to gender so its being aware of this when beneficial & also when less relevant. Its definitely an area I'm trying to upskill myself in whether there should be physical differentials in training.**

**The main thing I'm conscious of with female athletes is our communication around their regular periods. Taking this into account with training planning & expectation around their window. Again making it normal to talk about & part of the dialogue'**

**'You can tell a lad run up this hill 10 times and they will do it but session could be hit and miss**

**Where as most women would want to know what pace/intensity? How should it feel? Are we looking for consistent times? Or a large drop off? Etc etc, because of the questions they often have better results from the training as they get the most out of the session!!'**

**' I'm generalising and there will be exceptions but mostly it's like this'**

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**'I find women to be better planners and organisers so they  
have more questions in order to do this!'**

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**'I think it's more important to understand the individual and interact accordingly rather than based on their gender'**

**“I don’t think I ever start out thinking this is a female athlete and I must treat them differently to male athletes.**

**I’m proud to coach in a sport where the biggest stars are just as likely to be female as male. If there is a difference it is drawn out as I get to know the athlete. I hope I am informed and show awareness of the challenges encountered by female athletes in my practice. ”**

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**'Been fortunate in the girls I coach have been head down and just get on with it people so approach hasn't really changed to be honest. The flip side is that I have had to be a bit more forceful in telling them when to rein it in a bit.'**

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**We are all very open with each other and discussing menstrual cycles is not a 'taboo area'. We openly talk about this around the male athletes too**



# QUESTIONS

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