



# Positive Thoughts Positive Performance

21-Day Introductory Journal for  
Better Wellbeing for Student-Athletes

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## Introduction

*“It’s not the reality in which we live that shapes us. It’s the lens that views the world that shapes our reality.*

*If we can change the lens, we can change our happiness.”*

Shawn Achor, Happiness researcher and author.

As this quote suggests, our lives are made up of what we choose to notice in our minds. If you choose to focus on what you have done well, what you’re grateful for, and the positive experiences in your life, you will find your world a better place. If you choose to focus on negative events, what you don’t have or are overly self-critical, you will struggle to find enjoyment in your life. UniSport Australia have designed this journal to guide you on the positive pathway and improve your overall wellness.

### [So what is wellness?](#)

Wellness is an ongoing state of being well, satisfied and content. Whilst there are many theories and methods to promote wellness, this journal focuses on three concepts – *positive thinking, practicing gratitude and support networks*.

### [1. Positive Thinking](#)

The saying ‘your body hears everything your mind says’ couldn’t be closer to the truth. If we train our brains to think of the positives in various situations you will approach the world differently. This journal will encourage you to think and reflect more positively.

## 2. [Gratitude](#)

Demonstrating and feeling gratitude will increase feelings of richness in your life, as well as help gain a greater appreciation for the smaller pleasures. This journal will ask you to think about who and what you are grateful to have in your life to promote such feelings.

## 3. [Support Networks](#)

Your support network consists of the people who support you in your daily life – both personally and professionally. Identifying and connecting with your support networks are great ways to promote a healthy and happy mind. This journal will ask you to reflect on the people who make up your support network.

This journal will ask you to complete short daily reflection activities, covering these 3 concepts, over a 21-day period – all with the aim of improving your wellbeing. Organisations such as the *University of Pennsylvania* and the *National Rugby League (NRL)* have implemented similar processes and reported positive impacts on both wellbeing and performance.

The journal also contains other wellness strategies and resources that you should consider (e.g. dealing with stress, dealing with emotions and goal setting).

[www.unisport.com.au](http://www.unisport.com.au)

**Disclaimer: The advice and information provided in this document is designed as a guide only. If you have concerns about your physical or mental health you should consult your general practitioner.**

## How to Use the Journal

### **Step 1: Complete the Goals and Values questions on Page 7.**

These questions will shape your thinking and focus for the daily reflections.

### **Step 2: Choose a time and a place to complete the daily reflection.**

During the morning while you eat your breakfast. Or at night before you go to bed. This is up to you. Maybe you want to start each day off on a positive note or end it on one. This is entirely up to you.

### **Step 3: Start at Day 1 and return daily to answer the question(s) for each day.**

A new habit can take time to develop so commit to it for a few days and see how you go. For the sake of 5 minutes per day, it is worth it.

### **Step 4: Enjoy the benefits.**

By choosing to focus on what you have done well, what you are grateful for, and the supportive people in your life, your feelings of wellbeing will improve. You will find the world to be a better place and you will start to notice more things to appreciate. Enjoy!

**Note:** This journal is intended for your own private reflections and is not intended to be shared. This is to encourage you to deeply and accurately reflect on your life and experiences without judgement.

**Go ahead and give it a try. For the sake of 5 minutes a day, what have you got to lose!**

## Goals and Values Questions

Whilst completing the journal, you should consider your own personal goals and values. This will encourage you to focus on what is important to you and shape your thinking. You should revisit these goals and values regularly.

[What are your long-term goals or objectives?](#)

[What are your short-term goals for the next 6 months?](#)

[What are the personal values that are most important to you?](#)

For example – Hardworking, resilient and professional.

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## Day 1

What are 3 things you are grateful for right now?

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What went well in the last 24 hours?

And what or how did you contribute to making it happen?

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### **Daily Wellbeing Quote**

*“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never have enough.”*

Oprah Winfrey



## Increase Your Daily Gratitude

Demonstrating and feeling gratitude increases feelings of richness in your own life, as well as an appreciation for the daily small pleasures you experience. This also better positions you to deal with any complexities and issues you will face throughout your daily life.

There is a brief [TED Talk](#) that gives an overview on how practicing gratitude has been proven to improve happiness.

*Google “ED TED gratitude”.*

How can you improve your gratitude? In addition to completing this journal, you can also try the following:

- Make daily mental notes of what you are grateful for (e.g. your family, your achievements or your favourite food).
- Make a mental note of at least one positive event every day.
- Let your significant others know that you are grateful to have them in your life or do something for them (e.g. take them to dinner).
- See challenges and change as opportunities to grow and become better – be grateful for the experience.
- Give random acts of kindness to others (e.g. offer your seat to someone on the train or hold a door for someone).
- When things are not going well try to find ‘a silver lining’. An example might be if you are injured, it may mean you have more time to study or socialise with friends.

The [University of Minnesota](#) also has some great tips to introduce gratitude in your life.

*Google “University of Minnesota more thankful person”.*

## Day 2

Name a time when you have succeeded.

How did this experience make you feel?

---

What is one thing that you will do well in the next 24 hours?

---

### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“Your body hears everything your mind says: STAY POSITIVE!”*

## Power of Positivity

A number of athletes talk about the power of being positive, even during times of adversity. As you will in this short [video](#) ([Google “dr jarrod spencer video tennis”](#)), there is evidence that positive thinking is the difference between the top 5 tennis players in the world compared to the rest of the top 25.

What can you do to introduce more positivity in your life? Try these:

- STOP focussing on negative events, such as poor results or mistakes. INSTEAD think about what is going well and why.
- STOP predicting negative outcomes before they occur. INSTEAD focus on what you can control and do your best at those.
- STOP comparing yourself to others. Everyone has unique circumstances that impact them differently. INSTEAD focus on achieving the best you can in your circumstances.
- STOP listening to your ‘inner critic’ who wants to bring you down and will only accept perfection. INSTEAD allow your ‘inner coach’ to tell you about what you are doing well and support you to learn from mistakes.
- STOP elevating the small things and making them into disasters in your mind. INSTEAD take a deep breath and reflect if it is really that bad.
- STOP viewing challenges and changes as negative. INSTEAD see them as opportunities to grow and get better.

The [University of Sunshine Coast](#) has some great practical ideas to introduce more positive thinking in your life. [Google “USC reframing your thinking”](#).

## Day 3

What are the 3 greatest achievements in your life to date?

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List the talents or skills that you are most grateful to have.

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Don't dwell on the past – rather see it like valuable training that you learn from.

## Building Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is the belief in yourself and your abilities. Athletes such as Venus Williams, Rafael Nadal and multi-Olympic gold medallist Victoria Pendleton have publicly declared periods of low self-confidence but have bounced back to achieve greatness.

Here are some simple ways to improve your self-confidence:

- Practice gratitude to gain a greater appreciation of the great things in your life.
- List your strengths and think about things you have done well in the past.
- Remember and write times you have been given positive feedback or performed well.
- Don't focus on things outside of your control – this will only bring you down.
- Monitor your self-talk and focus on your 'inner coach' instead of your 'inner critic'. Your 'inner coach' will tell you about what you are doing well whilst your inner critic will expect unattainable perfection.
- Take a chance on things, even when you do not feel confident. Reward yourself after doing this.
- Learn from any mistakes you may make.
- Never be afraid to ask for help.

The [University of Queensland Student Services](#) website has additional information and strategies regarding improving self-confidence.

Google "UQ self confidence".

## Day 4

Who are the people that you are most grateful to have in your life?

Make a list of the people you can contact for personal support.  
Then do the same for those you can make contact for professional advice and support.

**Personal support**

**Professional support**

---

### **Daily General Wellbeing Tip**

Dedicate time to spend with friends and family, even if it is just a quick phone call.

## Support Networks

Surrounding yourself with a positive support network improves feelings of perceived social support which is proven to be linked to wellbeing. Some tips to consider when it comes to your support network are:

- Stay in touch with family and close friends as they are the most important people in your life.
- Be there for others when they need help and they will be there for you when you need it.
- Identify one or more professional mentors whom you feel confident to ask questions and advice.
- Avoid overly negative people or those who may drain your energy.
- Find a counsellor or psychologist and don't be afraid to regularly speak to them about any problems you may be having. One option is your university's student counsellor service.
- Most universities offer a peer support network program (or similar) that links students with their peers. Do some research on this or ask your student support service staff.

For more info and practical tips visit the 'Staying Connected' Module at [www.thedesk.org.au](http://www.thedesk.org.au) (note that new users will need to quickly sign-up for this free service).

[Beyondblue](#) also have some great discussion threads on building support networks. *Google* "[building support network beyondblue](#)".

## Day 5

Name something you did that made you feel happy in the last week.

---

How have you helped someone with something recently? Write it down no matter how small your help was.

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### **Daily Wellbeing Quote**

*“Forget the mistake but remember the lesson”*



## Sleep

Sleep plays an important role in both physical and mental wellbeing. A lack of sleep will negatively affect performance, muscle recovery, reaction time, concentration and cognitive ability. This [video](#) highlights some other negative impacts of not sleeping ([Google “10 Scary Sleep Deprivation video”](#)).

To be successful as athletes and students alike, you MUST prioritise sleep. Here are some tips when it comes to sleeping:

- Aim for about 8 hours of sleep per night.
- Have a consistent bedtime and wake-up schedule to promote a stable circadian rhythm.
- Avoid bright screens for 30mins before going to sleep. Try reading a book instead.
- Avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening.
- If you are someone who struggles to sleep due to overthinking things, place a pen and paper near your bed so you can quickly write down what you are thinking to get them out of your mind.
- If you have time, try napping for 10-30mins (no longer than an hour) during the early afternoon. Just be sure to avoid napping in the 4 hours prior to your typical bedtime.
- Try breathing or meditation techniques to help you relax prior to sleeping.
- Try to simulate regular sleeping arrangements when you are away from home. Familiar items like a pillow or sleeping mask can also help.

The [Australian National University](#) has additional information and strategies to improve sleeping habits. [Google “ANU Sleep”](#).

## Day 6

Thinking back to when you have been upset or angry, what are some techniques that have helped you to deal with this in the past?

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What's one mistake that you are grateful to have made and why?  
What did you learn from this?

**From this I learnt**

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Sleep well: Sleeping is the most important recovery strategy for athletes and students alike. Aim for at least 8 hours per night.

## Dealing with Emotions

Whilst emotions are completely normal human processes, sometimes these feelings can negatively impact how we behave and perform. Sadness, anxiety and aggression are 3 emotions in particular that students and athletes may have difficulties in regulating. Some simple tips to help with these emotions, and others, include:

- Take a deep breath. Acknowledge the emotion that you are experiencing and ask yourself why are you experiencing this?
- Take a break from whatever you are doing – even for just 5 minutes.
- Do some exercise – even if it is just a walk.
- Connect with a friend or family member.
- Try some positive self-talk.
- Try some mindfulness exercises (see page 25).
- Make sure you are getting plenty of sleep as sleep deprivation can negatively impact emotional regulation (see page 17).
- Avoid self-medicating as an emotional regulation strategy.

You may also consider contacting your GP or any of the following professional services to assist with dealing with emotions:

- Your university's counsellor service.
- *Beyondblue* – [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- *Crossing the Line* - <https://crossingthelinesport.com/>
- *Headspace* – [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

## Day 7

Describe a happy memory from the last 12 months.

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If you could go back 12 months, what is one thing you would tell yourself to worry less about? Keep this in mind for the future.

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### Daily Wellbeing Tip

Try some mindfulness activity or meditation to bring your attention to the present and release the anxiety of the future and negativity of the past.

## Tips to Deal with Stress

A little bit of stress is normal and healthy – in fact it motivates us to do great things. However, too much stress can be detrimental to performance and have negative effects on wellbeing. A short video outlining how excessive stress can negatively impact us is available [here](#) (Google “business insider stress YouTube”).

Some practical tips to deal with stress are:

- Take a break from whatever is making you stressed and do something else (e.g. watch a movie or phone a friend).
- Do some physical activity (e.g. walking).
- Try some relaxation techniques (e.g. breathing or meditation).
- Find a quiet place to think away from distractions.
- Try listening to your favourite music.
- Let yourself rest when you need to. You may feel like you do not have time for this but even a short break can make a big difference.
- Develop a plan to deal with whatever is making you stressed and revisit it regularly.
- Speak out and ask for help or advice from family, friends or a professional.

For more information, you can contact your university’s student counsellor service. The [University of South Australia](#) have some useful information in dealing with stress that is worth a read.

Google “unisa stress”

## Day 8

Name a goal that you are proud to have achieved and why?

---

Name three things that you will do well over the next month to achieve your goal(s).

---

### Daily Wellbeing Tip

Implement more gratitude in your life by making daily mental notes of the things you are grateful for (e.g. your family, your favourite food, your favourite TV show, etc.).

## Setting Goals

Goals give clarity, motivation and assist in decision-making. They can also help to get through difficult periods, knowing there is a 'light at the end of the tunnel' and remembering why you are doing certain things. An example of a goal setting process is below:

- i) Write down your ultimate goal(s). For example, achieve selection into a national team or complete your degree.
- ii) Break the ultimate goal down into short-term goals (e.g. achieve a certain time or performance at an event, finish semester 1 of university with a certain grade).
- iii) Consider and write-down what tasks or actions that you need to accomplish to achieve your short-term goals (e.g. complete a certain amount of training or study 2 hours every night).
- iv) Regularly track your performance against these tasks and short-term goals to monitor your progress.
- v) You may also need to alter your task or goals dependent on your situation and/or progress – this is perfectly normal.

Your sport coach or university counsellor are also useful to speak to in regards to setting goals – although you must individually decide your own goals.

[Deakin University](#) has some useful information and strategies regarding goal setting. *Google* "goal setting Deakin".

## Day 9

Describe the time when you were your happiest.

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What is one song you are grateful for?

Go listen to it now.

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“One small positive thought in the morning  
can change your whole day.”*



## Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the exercise of drawing attention to the present and allowing worrying thoughts about the past and future to come and go without judgement. Many athletes practice mindfulness, including LeBron James and Novak Djokovic. The benefits include:

- Improving your mind's ability to deal with stress and anxiety;
- Increasing your mind's ability to deal with adversity; and
- Improve mental function such as concentration.

An introductory mindfulness exercise is below:

- I. Find a quiet and comfortable area to sit or lay down.
- II. Give yourself a minute or two to settle your body and your mind - Try to let go of any thoughts and clear the mind.
- III. Focus your attention on the feeling of being you. Think about who you are? How does it feel to be you? What is it that makes up your inner self?
- IV. If you find yourself distracted, bring your awareness back to yourself by asking "To whom is this thought occurring?"
- V. The goal here is to be aware of yourself and to bring awareness to the source of all that you are.

Both [The University of Melbourne](#) and the [University of South Australia](#) have short online audio activities to practice mindfulness. Google "[unimelb mindfulness](#)" OR "[unisa mindfulness](#)".

There are also several Apps that show how to practice mindfulness. These include 'HeadSpace' and 'Buddhify'. To access these and others visit your App store.

## Day 10

Detail a time when you faced a fear of failure and succeeded.

What did you do on this occasion to deal with your fear?

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What are you grateful for right now?

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Only focus your thoughts and energy on what you can control.

## Dealing with a Negative Result

Whether it be in your sporting, educational or professional life, you will have a negative result or performance at some stage. This can cause disappointment, sadness, stress, confusion and/or anger. All these feelings are normal and just highlight how much the performance or result meant to you.

What are some ways to assist in dealing with a negative result? Start with the below:

- Take some space to give your brain a break – go for a walk, go out for a coffee or watch a movie.
- Try talking to someone not directly involved in the result or outcome, such as a family member, friend or a counsellor.
- Consider resetting your own expectations – they may have been unrealistic.
- When you feel ready, reflect on the performance. What was out of your control and should be forgotten? What did you learn? What are some ways to improve this for next time?

When you feel ready to do so you should also revisit, and if required re-evaluate, your goals to get you thinking about and focussed on your next target.

## Day 11

Describe a time that you have made a good choice under pressure.

---

Who are you grateful to have in your life right now?

why?

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“Some people grumble that roses have thorns;  
I am grateful that thorns have roses.”*

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

## Wellness Apps

There are a number of Apps now available covering wellness areas such as meditation, dealing with stress, sleep and gratitude.

### ***Smiling Mind***

Provides meditation exercises for all levels of experience including a sport section.

### ***10% Happier***

Designed for those who are sceptical of the concept of meditation or are too fidgety for traditional forms of meditation.

### ***Hear and Now***

Designed to help during intense moments of anxiety and stress. By pressing a finger, the App can monitor your heart rate and use that information to gauge specific breathing exercises to do as well as personalised music.

### ***Happier***

Happier is an on-the-go gratitude journal to record happy moments - writing down things we appreciate in a scientifically proven way to feel more positive and optimistic. You can also complete very short courses to discover new ways to find joy and help you become more resistant to negativity you may encounter, and more resilient overall.

Go ahead and try some of them yourself. Just go to your App store and search for the title.

## Day 12

Detail a time you were given positive feedback from someone.

How did this make you feel?

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What is one thing you did well over the last 24 hours?

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Practice mindfulness daily to focus on the present and ensure your worrying thoughts about the past and future come and go without judgement.

## Journaling

Regular journaling is another great way to reflect and promote feelings of wellbeing. It can help you find meaning in your experiences, view things from a different perspective and see positives in stressful or negative experiences.

Some helpful tips to get you started are:

- Focus on writing and giving it your full attention.
- Review, reflect and just write – don't overthink it.
- You may write a few words or several pages – do whatever you feel is best.
- Write as if no one else will read it.
- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes to write as much as you can in that time.
- Re-read what you have written before finishing.

A recent trend is also the use of photos in journaling. This involves simply taking photos of your daily experiences and then reflecting and writing notes on how each photo makes you feel. There are several photo journaling Apps that make this process very easy – just search '*photo journal*' in your App store.

## Day 13

Name one thing that you are grateful you experienced during the last 12 months.

Why is this case?

---

What has made you smile or laugh in the last 7 days?

---

### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“The difference between winning and losing is most often not quitting.”*

Walt Disney



## Daily Wellbeing Checklist

Using a daily wellbeing checklist is a great way to set you up for a productive and positive day. Some example options to include in your mental health checklist are below. You should design your own to match your interests and lifestyle.

- Go for a morning walk.
- Practice some mindfulness.
- Eat a nutritious breakfast while completing your daily journal questions.
- Practice some daily gratitude.
- Write down the tasks that you would like to complete for the day.
- Listen to your favourite music.
- Check in with a friend or family member.
- Do some journaling.
- Get to bed early to prep for the next day.

Find out what works best for you and start putting it in place.

## Day 14

What are you looking forward to most over the next week?

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Spend a minute imagining yourself back at the happiest moment of your life. Write down this experience and why you wanted to relive it.

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“Happiness is a decision. You are as happy as you decide to be.”*

## Day 15

Who is the most positive person you know?

Write some examples of occasions where they have shown this.

---

Who is one person you would like to get to know better? Why?

Be sure to go ahead and contact with them then...

---

### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Reach Out: Never be afraid to ask for help from family or friends or seek out the advice of a professional.

## Day 16

Briefly detail times when you felt the following in the last few months?

Interested	
Excited	
Hopeful	
Proud	
Inspired	
Loved	

### Daily Wellbeing Tip

Practice daily gratitude to put things into perspective. When you can see the good as well as the bad, you will complain less and focus on progression.

## Day 17

Name a setback or something that didn't work out for you recently?

What are the things in this situation that were out of your control and should be forgotten?

What are some things that you learnt from this situation for you to apply in the future?

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*"The comeback can always be stronger than the setback."*

## Day 18

Name something simple you have done in the past that you are extremely grateful for now.

---

What is your next major goal or objective?

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“Enjoy the little things for one day you may look back and realise they were big things.”*

Robert Brault

## Day 19

[Where would you like to be in 12 months?](#)

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[What can you do over the next 7 days to get there?](#)

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Always set SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bounded.

## Day 20

What is something you have done well since starting to use this journal?

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What are some things you can do to start tomorrow in a positive way?

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### Daily Wellbeing Quote

*“Positive anything is better than negative nothing.”*



## Day 21

What have you noticed or learnt from doing this journal the last 21 days?

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What will you do to get more of this?

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### **Daily Wellbeing Tip**

Make sure you self-reflect daily to promote positivity and growth in yourself. The reflection should not be assessing what was good or bad, rather understanding what you have learnt and how to apply this in the future.

## What Next?

Hopefully you have found using this journal a worthwhile and rewarding process. However, the journey should not end here. You can continue your reflections by simply writing down answers to these questions each day:

[1 – What am I grateful for right now?](#)

[2 – What will I do well today?](#)

[3 – What can I learn from yesterday?](#)

[4 – Who can I connect with for some help or support right now?](#)

You should also consider implementing a *Daily Wellbeing Checklist* as described in page 33.

We hope you have enjoyed using this journal. If you have any comments or feedback, please feel free to get in touch at [www.unisport.com.au/contact-us](http://www.unisport.com.au/contact-us)

## Additional Support

### **Local GP**

If you are unsure of what support and/or assistance might work for you, speaking to your Local GP is the best place to start.

### **University Student Counselling Services**

Most university's offer a free student counselling service through Student Services. Contact your university directly or view the university's website if you would like more info on this service.

### ***Crossing the Line***

[Crossing the Line \(CTL\)](#) offers a confidential service where athletes can share their stories and receive expert advice and information on mental health, wellbeing, education and transitioning to life after sport. They deliver webinars, workshops, seminars as well as providing one-on-one support. [Google "crossing the line sport"](#).

### ***Beyondblue***

[Beyondblue](#) provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health. For immediate and free support contact 1300 22 46 36. They also provide numerous helpful resources on their website. [Google "beyondblue"](#).