



THE GREATER GAME

INFORMATION BOOKLET



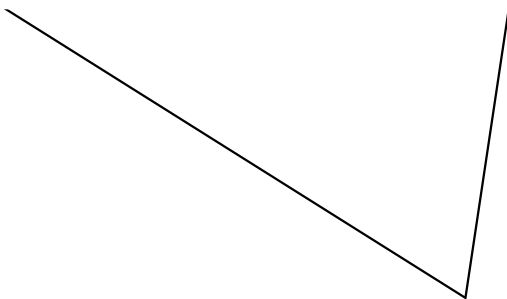
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For adults who coach, or are parents and carers of 12-16-year-olds.

OBJECTIVES

To educate adults on the importance of moving, eating, sleeping, and thinking well.

To provide information and strategies that coaches or parents and carers can use to encourage their young people to make one healthier action per week.



CHAPTER ONE:

MOVE WELL

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'MOVING WELL'?

You might think that a young person who plays football outside of school is relatively active and this might well be the case. However, young people are spending more and more time sitting or lying down (sedentary behaviour). This is having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as their performance on the pitch.

As a coach or parent and carer, your role is to support young people to move more, even when they aren't training or playing a match.



SO, WHY IS GOOD MOVEMENT IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PLAYERS?

Good movement is key to feeling better and performing better. Here's why:



Builds endurance



It's all about going the distance. For example, grassroots footballers might only train for one or two hours a week, and play one game at the weekend. This is a relatively low amount of time spent active if it's the only exercise they do in a week. Imagine then if they're playing a cup final match and the score is 2-2.

In the dying minutes of the game, their teammate plays them through. They could score the winner, but they've run out of energy, and the opposing team take the ball back! Taking part in regular physical activities can help young players increase their fitness levels, which in turn can improve their on-pitch performance.

Prevents injuries



Studies have found that players who spend more time sitting are more likely to get injured when they play. To avoid injuries and make sure they're available for the next game, young players need to be physically active every day.

Promotes good sleep



Moving more during the day helps us sleep better at night. And, as we know, good sleep is linked to better health and wellbeing and improved football performance (see our Sleep Well resources to find out more).

Boosts mood



Any physical activity can help to relax the mind and reduce negative thinking, which can lead to better performance on the pitch.

So, think about how young people can build activity into their day. For example, taking the dog for a walk, helping a family member do some gardening, or choosing to take the stairs instead of a lift – it all helps!

WHAT MIGHT STOP TEENAGERS FROM BEING ACTIVE?



They're on social media



Did you know, on average, young people in the UK spend almost two hours a day on TikTok and 90 minutes a day on Snapchat! And this trend is becoming more common.

It's important to understand that young people are using social media more and this is impacting their activity time.

They're gaming



Over half of the young people in the UK are inactive and do less than an hour of activity per day. Instead, they're doing other things, like gaming.

Gaming can be great fun and gives young people a chance to chat and socialise with their friends. However, excessive video game use could mean that they're not getting the physical activity they need to support their health and wellbeing – or hone their skills as a footballer.

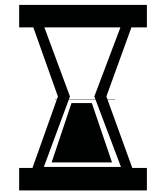
They're pressured



If a young person's friends are online, it can be difficult for them to go offline and do something more active.

Research shows that young people often mimic the actions and behaviours of their parents, carers, and other significant adults in their lives. Therefore, positive role modelling can be a good way to show a young person how important it is to be active.

They're busy



Young people are often juggling a lot between school, homework, family life, and hobbies.

Therefore, it can be difficult for them to find time to stay active. Don't worry, there's lots of tips and tricks below to help them move well, even when things get busy.

MOVE WELL STRATEGIES

We know that more people than ever are leading inactive lifestyles. As a coach or parent and carer, there are lots of techniques you can use to support young people to get active and move better.

- **Play other sports:** To become a good football player, young people don't have to only play football. For example, sports such as cycling and skating are really good for helping to build leg strength, and yoga and rowing are really good for improving power, core strength, and muscular endurance.
- **Schedule breaks:** Encourage young people to set social media or gaming boundaries. For example, after 30 minutes of online time or when they get a new high score, they agree to take a short break and get active. And this doesn't mean they need to go for a long run. Even doing a couple of strength exercises is better than nothing!
- **Practise, practise, practise:** Regular practise, outside of training sessions or matches, will help young people improve their on-pitch performance. Challenge them to work on a skill they want to improve each week, either in the garden or down at the park with a friend. This will not only help them move more, but they'll also enjoy learning a new skill that they can show off in training.
- **Get creative:** Top players and clubs have access to expensive gym equipment and fitness coaches, but there's a lot that young players can do at home to get active. For example, exercises like squats, lunges, skips, press-ups, and planks don't need any equipment and there are lots of useful online tutorials to demonstrate how to do them correctly.





- **Don't give up:** Being active for a week is great but it can be hard to keep it up over a longer period of time. To help young people keep active, they could try to find a friend or family member to be active with, even if it's simply going for a walk together. Supporting and cheering each other on as you work out is a great way to stay motivated and keep going.

CHALLENGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO MOVE MORE

Teenagers are awake for at least 15 hours a day. Our challenge to you is to support young people to make at least one of these hours active.

You can encourage them to make more active choices such as:

- starting their day with 10 minutes of skipping
- doing 10 squats and lunges when they get out of bed
- using the stairs rather than the escalator or lift
- signing up for an afterschool club they've never tried before.

USE A PLANNER

An activity planner is a great way to encourage young people to get at least 60 minutes of exercise every day by recording how much activity they do. Here's an example planner:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
15 minutes	Walk to the bus stop to get to school						
15 minutes	Lunch football club						
15 minutes	Walk the dog after school						
15 minutes	10x lunges, squats and sit ups before bed						
Activity goal achieved?							
Extra activity?	No						

HOW TO USE IT

Help young people set their activity goals across the week in 15-minute slots. Encourage young people to celebrate when they achieve or exceed their targets. You could even promote healthy competition between teammates.

Remember, the best way to get their commitment is to let young people decide what activities to do!

IF YOU NEED MORE SUPPORT...

... check out the following resources:

- [Health for Teens](#) has a variety of inspirational videos and other resources that provide exercise ideas and help to deal with stress.
- [Mind](#) has some great information on the link between physical activity and mental health.

CHAPTER TWO:

EAT WELL

WHY IS EATING WELL IMPORTANT IN FOOTBALL?

As young people grow and develop, they need a healthy, varied, and well-balanced diet. This ensures they have the energy and nutrients to perform well at school and play their best on the pitch. Talking to a young person about healthy eating can be difficult, especially when there are so many food choices available.

The key is to help young people understand the benefits of eating healthily.



SO, WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF HEALTHY EATING ON THE FOOTBALL PITCH?



Recovery



When a footballer trains and plays, their body gets fatigued. A combination of good nutrition and quality sleep is needed to recover. These factors also help to reduce the risk of injury and illness.

Players who train several times per week or play other sports should be particularly aware of how healthy eating can positively impact their recovery.

Performance



You've probably heard players complaining after a game that they didn't think they played well.

This is a good opportunity to discuss reasons why they may have failed to perform at their best. Could it be because they didn't eat well? If so, can you encourage them to consider what foods they could eat next time to help improve their performance?

Focus



It's hard for young people to concentrate on playing (or anything) when hungry.

This is a common problem that affects those going to training straight after school. To improve their energy and focus levels, they should try to eat a healthy snack or meal before they train.

Confidence



Making the right food choices can help young people feel good about themselves.

Understanding that they're fuelling their bodies with the energy they need to perform well can boost their confidence and self-esteem.

WHY MIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE CRAVE SUGARY SNACKS?



They're growing



Research has found that young people tend to crave sugar far more than adults because their bodies need more calories to help them grow.

It's important to educate young people on what foods to eat to get the calories they need, other than foods with high amounts of added sugar.

They're busy



It can be difficult to eat well with a busy schedule. For example, if a young person is rushing straight to training after school.

Encourage young people to prepare food to eat on the way to training as there are usually limited healthy options if they're grabbing something on the road.

They're getting breakfast all wrong



Starting off the day with sugary cereal will cause blood sugar levels to spike and then crash soon after. This leaves their body wanting more throughout the day.

A better option would be to eat a breakfast that provides a slow release of energy throughout the morning, and gets them through to lunch time without feeling super hungry. Beans on brown toast or porridge with berries are great, quick options.

They're in a routine



Lots of young people (and adults) fall into the habit of eating something sweet after a meal. Eating well doesn't mean banning all sweet treats; it's about getting a balance.

Encourage young people to think about swapping their normal sweet treat for a healthier option a couple of times per week. It might be something as simple as picking a fruit they haven't tried before.

They're drinking too many energy drinks



Research shows that footballers who rely on energy drinks to get them through training and games are more likely to suffer from headaches, stomach aches, and poor sleep.

It's important to educate young people about the ingredients and the negative impact they can have on their health if over consumed.

EAT WELL STRATEGIES

As a coach or parent and carer, there are lots of ways to support young people to eat healthier, improve their wellbeing and help them feel great, both on and off the pitch.

- **Matchday nutrition:** The main source of energy for a match will be carbohydrates – think pasta, bread, oats, and potatoes – which should be eaten anywhere between one and four hours before kick-off.

However, if a young person isn't used to eating carbohydrates pre-exercise, they shouldn't try it on matchday. It could cause stomach problems which won't help their on-pitch performance!

- **Staying hydrated:** Dehydration is increasingly common in young people and will have a negative effect on their football performance.

Encourage young people to look out for signs from their body that they're becoming dehydrated. The most obvious one is that they start to feel thirsty. They should also keep an eye on the colour of their urine which should be clear after mid-day.

- **Half-time snacks:** It's important for players to eat well at half-time to restore their energy levels and help them perform at their best in the second half. Common snacks include bananas or oranges.
- **Snacks throughout the day:** It's not a bad thing for young people to snack in between meals, especially if they have a game or training and need that extra bit of energy! Lots of professional footballers will have a sweeter snack such as a piece of fruit or a smoothie between breakfast and lunch, and then a protein-based snack such as a yoghurt, hard-boiled egg or some nuts after lunch.



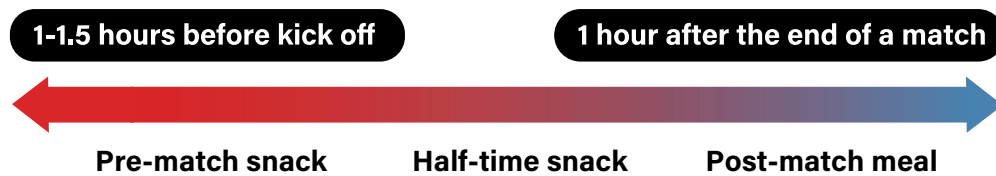
TOP TIP

If a training session lasts less than one hour, young people should drink water to rehydrate. If a training session is longer than one hour, young people might need to replace some of the salts they've lost through sweat by drinking a sports drink. Save money by making your own sports drink at home. Simply mix together 200ml fruit squash, 800ml water, and a pinch of salt.

- **Eating protein:** Protein is a great way to help footballers build their strength and avoid injury when training or playing.

Young people should aim to eat two or three sources of protein each day to meet requirements. This might seem a lot. But remember, this can be spread across the whole day and could include fish, lean meat, poultry, dairy products, nuts, beans, eggs, pulses, and soy products.

- **Timings:** It's important for young people to eat at the right times so that the food is properly digested, and the energy is available to support them, both on the pitch and with their recovery afterwards. Here's what we recommend:



- **Meal preparation:** Healthy eating prior to matchday can be made easy by thinking ahead. [Check out a sample meal plan here for some inspiration.](#) However, we recommend mixing it up so that your players don't get bored of eating the same things all the time!

IF YOU NEED MORE SUPPORT...

... check out the following resources:

- The [NHS](#) provides an overview of eating disorders, the warning signs and how to get help.
- The [NHS Healthy Eating Advice](#) website also has a useful section that offers information and guidance about eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- [Beat](#) is an eating disorder charity that provides support, through a national helpline, to anyone suffering from eating disorders or their family and friends.



CHAPTER THREE:

SLEEP WELL

WHY IS SLEEP IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PLAYERS?

Sleep plays an important role in the physical and mental development of all young people, but particularly for those who are active footballers. This is because good sleep is linked to better health and wellbeing and improved athletic performance.

As a coach or parent and carer, your role is to help young people understand how sleeping well can affect their performance on-pitch.



TELL ME MORE...

Getting a good night's sleep is key to feeling better and performing better. Here's why:

- **Reduces sugar cravings:** Good quality sleep promotes a healthy balance of appetite hormones that control cravings for sugary junk foods.
- **Boosts performance:** Young footballers who slept 8-10 hours a night showed improvements after only a few weeks. Their sprint times, shooting accuracy, and energy levels were better than when they only managed six to eight hours a night.
- **Improves focus:** Sleep helps you think more clearly and increases your ability to concentrate. This is particularly important for young players as training sessions tend to take place in the evenings after they've already had a long day at school.
- **Prevents injuries:** During a deep sleep, the body restores energy levels and repairs muscles, reducing the likelihood of injuries. Specifically, research suggests that poor sleep increases the risk of getting a muscle injury.



SLEEP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people often have more trouble getting to sleep at night because they have a different sleep cycle to adults. This means they may not get tired until later, which is a problem if they then have to get up early for school or a match.

They also need slightly more sleep than adults. Research suggests this can be anything from 9 to 12 hours for 6–12-year-olds and 8 to 10 hours for 13–18-year-olds.

As a coach or parent and carer, it's important to remember that young people may need to sleep more at the weekends to catch up on their recommended number of hours of sleep. If a young person needs to be up early for a match, encourage a good bedtime routine which includes going to sleep at a sensible time.



WHY MIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ISSUES WITH THEIR SLEEP?



They're anxious



Young people may be nervous about an upcoming match or exam pressures at school, which could be keeping them up at night.

They're stressed



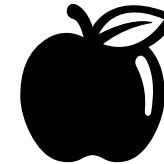
43% of teenagers who felt stressed said they didn't get enough sleep because their mind was racing.

They're not eating well



Young people who get less sleep also eat fewer fruits and vegetables the next day and tend to eat more sugary foods. This can then impact the quality of their sleep. Check out our Eat Well resources to help support young people to break this cycle.

They're distracted



Using electronic devices for long periods of time can negatively impact sleep and lead to daytime tiredness, especially among young people. This is alarming when you consider that one in five 13–15-year-olds spend five or more hours a day on social media. And, 95% of 15-year-olds use social media before or after school, with many also using it directly before bed.

SLEEP WELL STRATEGIES

On training or matchdays, young people may find it difficult to sleep due to the adrenaline running through their body. But they may also struggle to sleep on other days. As a coach or parent and carer, there are lots of techniques you can use to support young people to sleep better.

- **Schedule a nap:** Short power naps are a great way to recharge. However, they should be limited to 20-30 minutes. Any longer and they may leave your young person feeling groggy!
- **Find a routine:** Having a set bedtime routine every night can help young people establish their own sleep cycle and build healthy sleep habits. It's a good idea to start a bedtime routine before going into the bedroom. For example, they might read, draw, or do some yoga – anything that helps them unwind and switch off. Remember to think about the morning too. A good sleep routine means waking up at the same time every day – even at weekends.
- **Wake up, get up:** Did you know that sleep tends to work in 90 minute cycles? This means that it's normal to wake up several times during the night. However, if a young person is a deep sleeper, they might not even notice this. The trouble occurs when a young person wakes up and can't get back to sleep. If they do wake, encourage them not to clock watch as this can increase their anxiety and make it even more difficult to nod off. If they're struggling to get back to sleep, it's a good idea to get out of bed and do something different for a short while, such as read a book or listen to music. However, you should encourage them to avoid using their phone as the blue light will make them more awake.
- **Create a good sleep environment:** A cool, dark, and relaxing environment is essential for a good night's sleep. Encourage young people to prepare their bedroom accordingly:



- The ideal temperature for sleep is 16 to 18 degrees. Avoid using devices at least one hour before bed. If they need to use their phone as an alarm, tell them to put it on the other side of the room (on silent, of course) to stop them feeling tempted to check it during the night.
- Light (including artificial light from electronic devices) slows down production of melatonin which is the hormone that regulates the sleep-wake cycle. So, encourage young people to make their room as dark as possible. They could even use an alarm clock with a light that can be set to get darker as they lie in bed and then slowly get lighter again in the morning when they're due to wake up.
- Lots of studies show that clutter can make people feel stressed, which isn't what you want as you're getting into bed. So, encourage young people to keep their rooms tidy for better sleep.

IF YOU NEED MORE SUPPORT...

... check out the following resources:

- [The Sleep Charity](#) is packed full of advice and support for better sleep.
- [Headspace](#) is an app designed to improve the health and happiness of the world, and it has a section on sleep.
- [Calm](#) is an app for sleep, meditation and relaxation.
- [Sleep Advice Hub](#) contains lots of useful articles, videos, tips and tools to promote better sleep.



CHAPTER FOUR:

THINK WELL

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'THINKING WELL'?

Young people can find it hard to recognise, understand and talk about their thoughts and feelings. 'Thinking well' is all about being aware of how you see yourself and using this understanding to improve your wellbeing.

Football is a fantastic activity to help young people develop their self-awareness. And, when they feel good about themselves, they're more likely to perform at their best on the pitch.

Give your young people strategies for thinking well and educate them on the link between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.



HOW DOES THINKING WELL LINK TO THE PITCH?

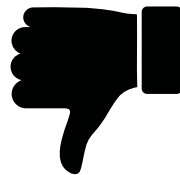


Enjoying themselves



Players who have a positive outlook are better able to accept that things might not always go their way.

Improving performance



Negative self-talk is a common issue that players face during a game. Focusing on mistakes, especially if they're not performing at their best, can lead to more mistakes and poor performance.

Taking risks



Imagine it's 0-0, and a player has the chance to pass to a teammate who can score a goal in the final minutes of the game, but they're afraid to pass and make a mistake. Effective footballers take risks, even if it leads to 'mistakes', because they know it's important and can help the team. We need our young players to feel this way too.

Dealing with pressure



Pressure to perform is a real thing, especially in a big game. Pressure isn't always a bad thing. In fact, there are techniques that young players can use to perform under pressure.

WHAT CAN CAUSE YOUNG PEOPLE TO THINK NEGATIVELY ABOUT THEMSELVES?

- **They have low self-confidence:** Low self-esteem can cause young people to focus on their flaws, rather than their strengths. Instead of talking positively about themselves, they'll say things like, "I'm not good enough". On the pitch, this can affect their ability to make the right decisions.
- **They're perfectionists:** Striving to be perfect can cause young people to have negative thoughts about their performance, especially when they make mistakes.

But they should know that all players, even those at the elite level, have bad games.

- **They're self-critical:** Young players can be overly critical of their performance, which stops them from enjoying and celebrating the good things they've done.

If you have any video footage of training or matches (with sufficient safeguarding policies in place), watch it back and reflect objectively on performances. The players will probably find that they performed better than they thought!



THINK WELL STRATEGIES

It's normal for young people to think negative thoughts sometimes or feel a bit out of their depth on the football pitch. As a coach or parent and carer, there are lots of ways to support young people to think well and believe in themselves!

- **It's all about them:** In a team sport like football, it can be difficult not to look at another player and think how they might be better. While it's great to learn from others, encourage young people to focus on themselves and what they're good at.
- **Promote continuous learning:** Every player that a young person watches on TV started in grassroots football and would've struggled with lots of parts of their game. Tell young people that even if they might not be able to do something really well right now, it doesn't mean they're a bad player; it just means they're still learning how to do it. Everyone has different strengths.
- **Encourage self-reflection:** It's easy to focus on the negatives after a match, but there are always things that went well. Try to make sure that young people reflect on all aspects of the game rather than just focusing on the mistakes.
- **Focus on what you can control:** No one person can control everything when playing a team sport.

Advise young people to focus on what they can control. For example, if they're playing in defence, how many times can they win the ball back? Setting these goals with a young player provides motivation and can help them feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of a game.



- **Use positive self-talk:** Being kind, compassionate and encouraging to yourself can help improve focus and boost self-confidence.

Encourage young players to stay in the moment and remain positive when faced with a pressured situation. For example, if stepping up to take a free-kick, they can say to themselves, "I've got this."

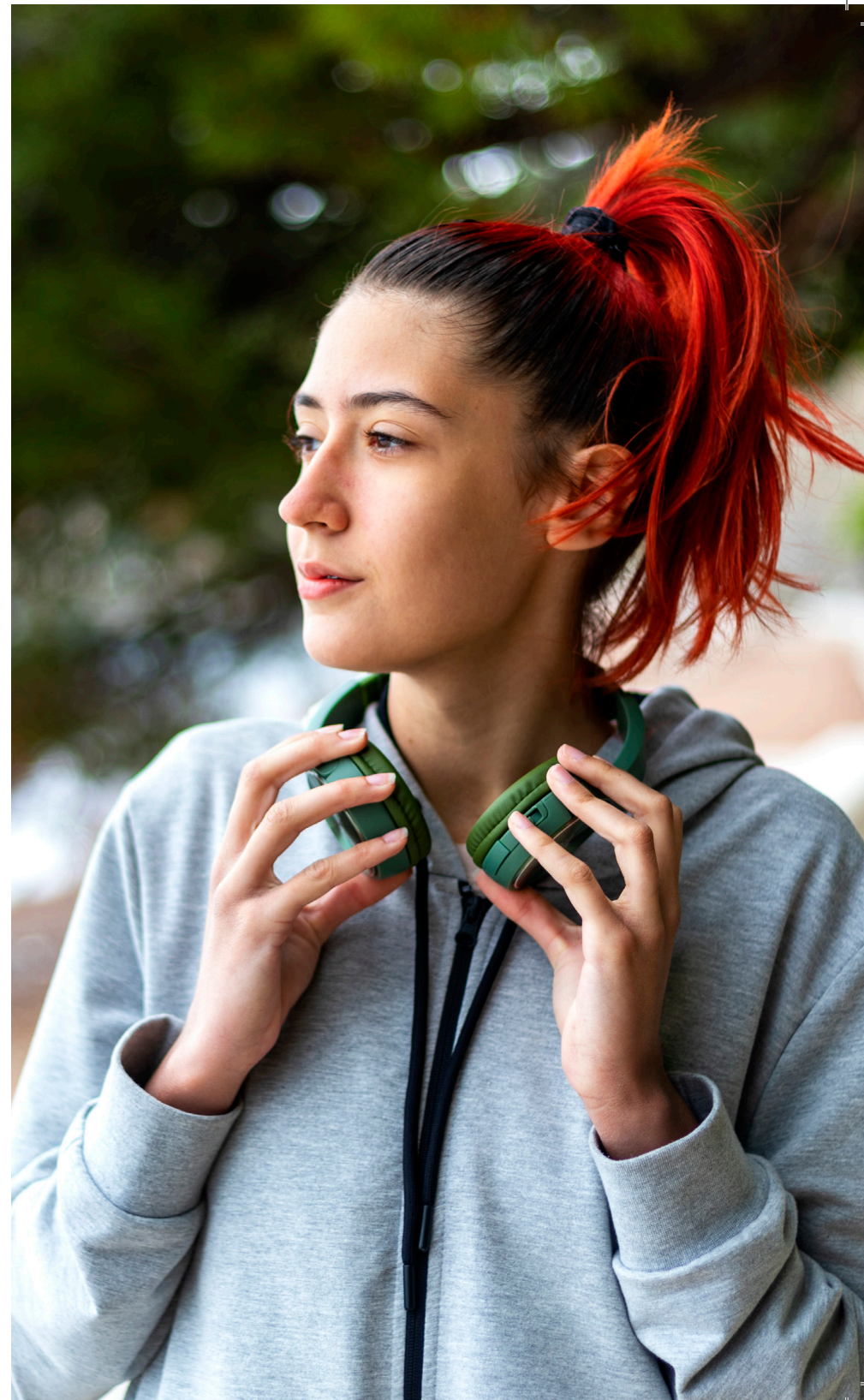
- **Find time to relax:** Balancing the demands of everyday life can be challenging for young people. They have school, homework, football training, seeing family and friends, and more to balance! It can be really tiring.

Try not to put too much pressure on them to do everything perfectly and make sure they have time to relax. Whatever they do to switch off, they shouldn't feel guilty doing it.

If you need more support...

... check out the following resources:

- **Headspace** is an app designed to improve the health and happiness of the world.
- **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)** provide information and support for anyone who's struggling to cope and needs to talk.
- **Kooth** is a safe and anonymous online community for young people.



SOURCES

MOVE WELL


- Average daily time spent by children in the UK on leading social media apps in 2022 (Statistica: 2023)
- Hill, Amelia: Social media triggers children to dislike their own bodies, says study (The Guardian: January 1, 2023)
- Why Exercise is Wise (Nemours Teens Health: 2022)
- Children's activity levels recover to pre-pandemic levels (Sport England: December 8, 2022)
- O'Keefe, Greg: Footballers and yoga: Extending careers by five years and creating an 'inner calm' (The Athletic: November 6, 2022)

EAT WELL

- Sentongo, T: Why young athletes should eat before and after the game (March 1, 2023)
- CatapultOne: Top Five Snacks for Football
- Collins J, Maughan RJ, Gleeson M, et al: UEFA expert group statement on nutrition in elite football. Current evidence to inform practical recommendations and guide future research (British Journal of Sports Medicine: 2021;55:416)





SLEEP WELL

- Athletes who slept for up to 10 hours a night showed significant improvements in performance (National Library of Medicine: 2021)

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- Teens with anxiety often struggle with getting enough sleep and teens who don't get enough sleep are more likely to develop sleep anxiety (Embark: Behavioural Health: 2023)
 - Increased stress can lead to reduced sleep (American Psychological Association: 2013)
 - Getting less sleep might lead to eating less fruit and vegetables the next day, and eating more sugary foods (International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity: 2023)
 - Screen time leads to reduced sleep (National Library of Medicine: 2018)
 - 95% of 15 year olds use social media before or after school (University of Glasgow: 2019)
 - 18% of teens sleeping fewer than seven hours a night were more likely to consume fast food two to three times a week (Stony Brook University School of Medicine: 2013)
 - A fifth of 13 to 15 year olds spend five hours or more a day on social media (University of Glasgow: 2019)

THINK WELL

- University of Rochester Medical Centre: Journaling for Emotional Wellness

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- [Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\)](#)
 - [Mental health for children, teenagers and young adults](#) (NHS)
 - Pluhar E, McCracken C, Griffith KL, Christino MA, Sugimoto D, Meehan WP 3rd: [Team Sport Athletes May Be Less Likely To Suffer Anxiety or Depression than Individual Sport Athletes](#). (J Sports Sci Med: August 1, 2019;18(3):490-496)
 - [Mental Health Report](#) (NHS)

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THE GREATER GAME