

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

ULSTER GAA HEALTH
& WELLBEING PROGRAMME



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk



DCAL

Department of Culture,
Arts and Leisure
www.dcalni.gov.uk

IN ULSTER GAA WE WANT ALL OUR PLAYERS TO BE THE VERY BEST THAT THEY CAN BE. THIS BOOKLET IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU BE JUST THAT - BY OFFERING ADVICE ON HOW ALCOHOL AND ILLEGAL DRUGS CAN AFFECT YOUR PERFORMANCE.

If you are serious about your sport, about getting fitter, stronger and more skilful, then there are plenty of messages in this booklet that will help you prepare well. The booklet will help you make informed decisions off the pitch so you can get maximum benefits on it.

In short, we want you to...

**BETHE
VERY BEST
THAT YOU
CAN BE**



PLAYING CELEBRATING AND DRINKING

The social side of Gaelic Games is very important and celebrating with team members after a match is a tradition in some clubs. However, if your celebrations involve drinking alcohol and especially if you drink to the point where you get drunk, this can seriously affect your performance.

If you take your sport seriously, and like to do the best you can for yourself and your team, it's worth knowing the facts and what you can do to reduce your risk of under-performing.

Greater risk of muscle cramps

During exercise, your muscles burn sugar thereby producing lactic acid. Too much lactic acid leads to muscle fatigue and cramps. If you drink in the 24 hour period before a match the alcohol contributes to a bigger build up of lactic acid and dramatically increases your risk of cramping.

Greater risk for injuries and complications

Alcohol increases the bleeding and swelling around soft tissue injuries (sprains, bruises, and cuts- the most common sports injuries) requiring a

longer recovery period. Alcohol also masks pain, which may lead you to delay in getting treatment—rapid treatment can make all the difference in a speedy recovery. If you've been injured, avoid alcohol, as it will complicate your recovery.

Greater body heat loss

Alcohol is a vasodilator (it causes the blood vessels near the surface of the skin to expand) and thereby promotes heat loss and a lowered body temperature.

Reduced endurance

The blood sugar your body needs for energy is produced by the liver when it releases glucose into the blood stream. Drinking alcohol in the 48 hour period before a match reduces your body's ability to produce this sugar, so you have less energy and less endurance capacity.

Slower reactions

Alcohol is a sedative and it can affect your performance during a game for up to 72 hours after you have finished drinking. Some players think they have less tension and increased relaxation as a result of alcohol. The actual result, however, is poorer hand-eye coordination and slower responses.

Dehydration

Alcohol promotes water loss. It reduces the production of the anti-diuretic hormone, causing you to urinate more. This, in turn leads to dehydration.

Vitamin and Mineral Depletion

Water loss caused by alcohol consumption involves the additional loss of important minerals such as magnesium, potassium, calcium, and zinc. These are vital to the maintenance of fluid balance and nerve and muscle action and coordination.

Reduced aerobic performance

Alcohol reduces the body's ability to convert food to energy and also reduces carbohydrate/blood sugar levels. These effects, together with lactic acid build-up and dehydration, combine to reduce aerobic performance.

Muscle injury

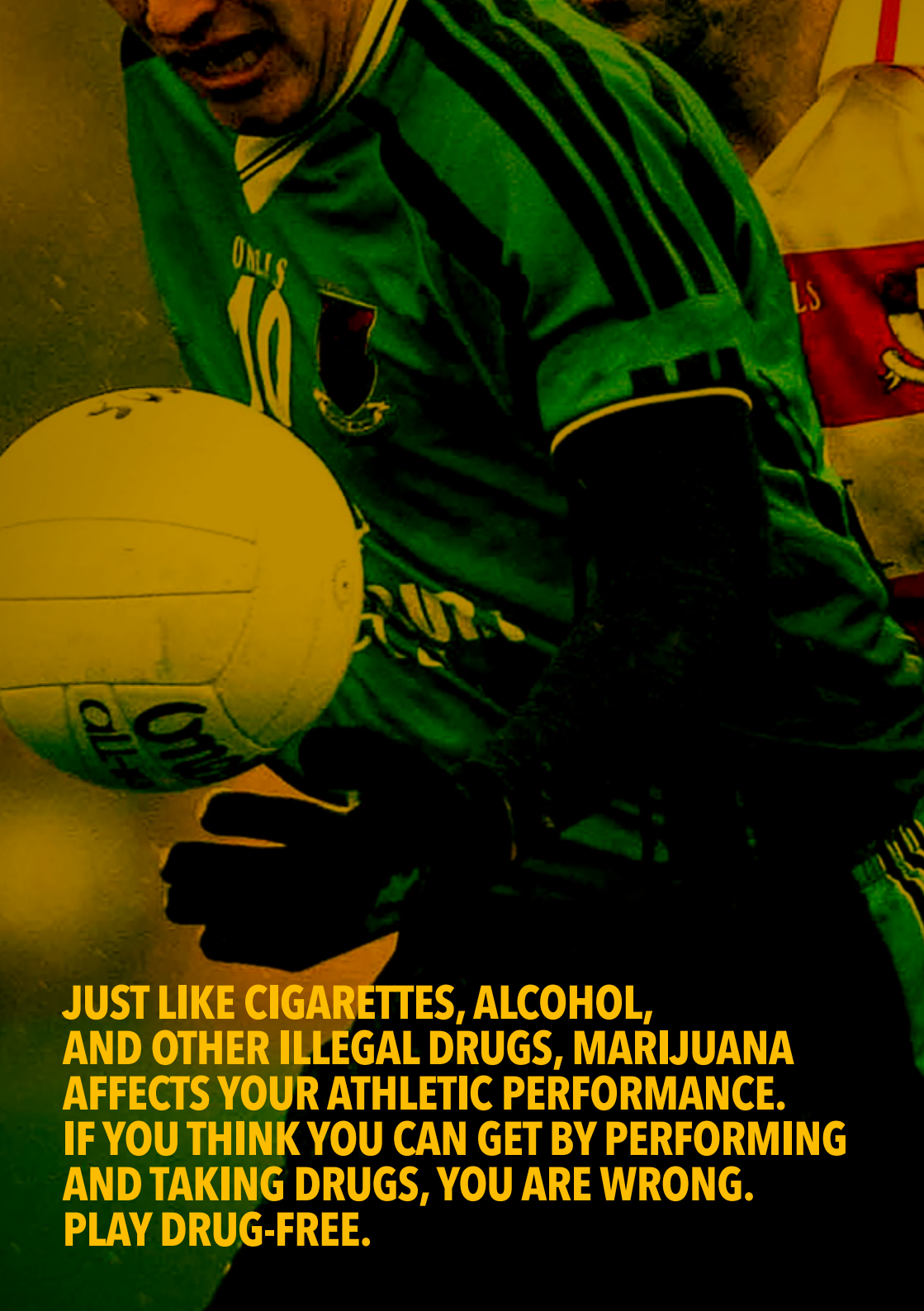
The usual treatment for injury (rest, ice, compression, elevation) can be negated due to the painkilling effect of alcohol. If you can't feel the pain of your injury you are less likely to take care of it and slow your recovery time or even cause further damage.

So, no matter how much training and conditioning you've put in, drinking up to 72 hours before a match will take the edge off your fitness.

If you want to be the very best you can be at your sport you'll have more of a chance of achieving that by not drinking alcohol.

However, if you do drink, try to limit how much and how often.





**JUST LIKE CIGARETTES, ALCOHOL,
AND OTHER ILLEGAL DRUGS, MARIJUANA
AFFECTS YOUR ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE.
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN GET BY PERFORMING
AND TAKING DRUGS, YOU ARE WRONG.
PLAY DRUG-FREE.**

DRUGS & SPORTS PERFORMANCE

THE EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA ON SPORTING PERFORMANCE

Just like alcohol, marijuana is a sedative and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) is the active compound which creates the 'stoned' effect which results in similar behaviours.

Here are just some of the effects of marijuana use on performance:

Aerobic Capacity

Marijuana use can decrease your aerobic capacity making you less efficient during exercise. You are at risk of respiratory problems the same as cigarette smoking.

Sickness

Marijuana use can weaken the immune system leaving you more likely to pick up colds, flus and other bugs.

Heart rate

Marijuana can increase resting heart rate and blood pressure. Add this to the increases that exercise causes in both heart rate and blood pressure, and your heart is working harder than your competitor's to perform at the same level.

Weight gain

Weight gain is common through the craving of sugary foods and a week after smoking cannabis only 60-70% of the THC has left the body because it is stored in the body fat.

THE EFFECTS OF STIMULANTS ON SPORTING PERFORMANCE - ECSTASY, COCAINE, SPEED

These drugs are powerfully addictive stimulant drugs which, not surprisingly, can have a serious effect both on your health and your sporting performance.

Heart rhythm

Stimulant use disturbs heart rhythm which causes complications such as abdominal pain, nausea and headaches to more extreme effects of chest pain, respiratory failure, strokes and seizures.

Weight loss

They can have a tendency to decrease appetite and many chronic users can become malnourished.

Strength and speed

Using cocaine for example will reduce your strength and speed. Bingeing in particular decreases serum testosterone levels which mean lower levels of aggression, effort, lean muscle mass, muscle recovery and overall athletic performance.

Recovery

The size of your blood vessels can decrease after use making your heart beat faster, and cause a rise in your blood pressure. Less blood and oxygen is able to reach your organs so performance and recovery after exercise is affected.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF OFF THE PITCH

HYDRATION

Your body is made up of two-thirds water and when you exercise much is lost through sweating, breathing and talking. In warm, and/or windy weather you lose even more!

As has already been established, consuming alcohol or taking illegal drugs can increase your risk of dehydration, which coupled with the loss of water as outlined above, can seriously affect your sporting performance.

Losing fluid can cause **dehydration** which leads to a *significantly reduced performance*. When you sweat you lose both fluid and body salts, which further impacts on your ability to play as well as you can.



HOW DOES DEHYDRATION AFFECT SPORTING PERFORMANCE?

Never underestimate the extent to which dehydration can affect your sporting performance. Below is a list of just how much your play could be affected:

- Higher heart rate
- Impaired aerobic capacity
- Reduced concentration and decision making
- Slower reaction times
- Impaired judgment
- Increased lactic acid in the muscles
- Decreased strength

Staying hydrated

In order to stay hydrated you need to ensure that you are consuming adequate amounts of fluid.

The recommendation for daily fluid consumption is **2 litres or 8 glasses**. This can come from a combination of water, milk, juices, tea etc. These recommendations are for the general population, for sports people it is essential that you meet and exceed these recommendations.

If you want to get really technical, the recommendations are that someone who is involved in sport should consume 1.5 litres of water for every 1kg of weight lost during a session. Many clubs have weighing scales in their changing room to allow players to monitor fluid loss and therefore ensure adequate intake thereafter.

Monitoring dehydration

Even at 1% dehydrated your performance will begin to suffer, yet your body will not feel thirsty until you are 2%. **Thirst is a poor indicator of dehydration—by this stage your performance could already be impaired.**

One way to monitor your hydration level is to keep a check on your urine colour. The chart (right) will assist with this.

Numbers 1–3 is the **target colour**, 4–5 suggests **mild dehydration** and 6–8 **severe dehydration**. If your urine is dark during the day, address this by drinking fluid.

URINE CHART

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

EATING RIGHT

It is important to eat a healthy balanced diet day in, day out. This way you will ensure that your body is getting the vitamins, minerals, nutrients and importantly, the energy, it needs stay healthy and meet the demands of training and matches. The following information is to help you make correct food choices .

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates provide you with **energy** and should be included in every meal you eat to ensure you have adequate stores for exercise. Examples of complex carbohydrates include: *bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice.*

Protein

Protein is essential for **building, maintaining and repairing muscle**. As an athlete you require more protein than those who do not take part in games. You can meet your protein needs by eating the following foods: *meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk and cheese.*

Fruit and Vegetables

You should aim to eat 5 portions of these each day to ensure your body gets the vitamins and minerals it needs to remain **healthy** and ensure a strong immune system.

Fats

It is important to have some fat in your diet as training/games lasting more than an hour will require energy from **FAT** stores. If a diet is too low in fat this may hinder performance. However, the **TIMING** of intake and **TYPE** of fat is important to consider. Fats can be slower to digest and should be avoided close to throw-in. When eating fats ensure that you include 'good' fats such as that found in oily fish, vegetable oils and nuts.



THINK IN TERMS OF PERFORMANCE

When you sit down to any meal, look at what is on your plate. You should be able to divide the contents equally into three categories:

PROTECT

REPAIR

ENERGY

YOUR PLATE SHOULD LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS:



Eating for training or a match

Pre match meal

You should eat your pre-exercise meal between 2-4 hours before start time, to allow you to fuel appropriately. Your meal should be carbohydrate based to provide you with extra energy, include lean protein for muscle strength and contain little or no fat so that it is easily digested. You should include a drink too! Examples include: pasta with tomato sauce; baked potato with beans; sandwiches with chicken/tuna/ham; porridge with fruit; toast with jam; include a drink ie water.

Pre warm-up

In the hour before start time, you should eat easily digestible carbohydrate snacks to help maximize your energy stores. You may choose to drink a sports drink as an alternative. It is vital that you are taking on fluids at this time, so have your water bottle handy. Examples include: *ripe bananas; oranges; jaffa cakes; jelly beans; sports drink.*

During match or training / Half time

Take on fluids as often as possible during exercise to replace those lost. Do not wait until you feel thirsty as you may well be dehydrated by this time.

Post Match / Training

After you have played a match or have been training your energy stores will be very low. It is vital that you begin re-fuelling immediately. The body can refuel most quickly in the first 30 minutes after you have finished exercise. Players should pack recovery snacks with their kit to allow refuelling to begin. Examples include: *sandwiches with protein; fruit; yoghurt; yoghurt drink; cereal bars; milk.*

TRAIN HARD. PREPARE WELL. WIN OR LOSE WITH HONOUR.



It is important that you follow up with a proper meal within 2 hours of exercise. Ensure that you rehydrate by drinking fluids.

REMEMBER THE RULES

A handy way to focus on the foods you should be eating is to remember why they are important for your performance. All the foods you eat should apply to the rules below:

TO PROVIDE ENERGY TO EXERCISING MUSCLES

TO HELP TISSUE (MUSCLES) GROW AND REPAIR

TO PROTECT AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY IMMUNE SYSTEM

TO REFUEL AND HYDRATE BETWEEN SESSIONS

Good Habits

Now that you understand the recommendations about eating well for Gaelic Games, the best thing to do is to get into the habit of practicing them. Here are a few tips to help you along the way:

- Always eat breakfast
- Never go to bed hungry
- Ensure you are eating a healthy diet to fuel your body for sport
- Do not take drugs
- Do not binge on alcohol and abstain from it in the run up to matches/training
- Get your own water bottle for daily use, training and matches
- Always pack a recovery snack to eat after exercise
- Never try something new on a match day—experiment at training instead
- Plan ahead if your usual routine is likely to be affected so you can still fuel and hydrate as normal



SPORT DOESN'T BUILD CHARACTER. SPORT REVEALS IT.

IF YOU NEED HELP OR SUPPORT...

If you feel you need further advice or support, or if you are concerned about either yourself or a friend or family member, open up to someone you trust. You can talk to a coach or someone in your Club community. They may not have all the answers but they will be able to direct you to the right person to give you the help you need. You may feel scared at the prospect of speaking to someone but be brave and take the first step to getting the support that's needed.

You can also visit:

www.ulster.gaa.ie/headsup
or www.gaa.ie

for more information on available support



CUMANN
CAMÓGAÍOCHTA
ULADH
ULSTER CAMOGIE



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk



DCAL

Department of Culture,
Arts and Leisure
www.dcalni.gov.uk

