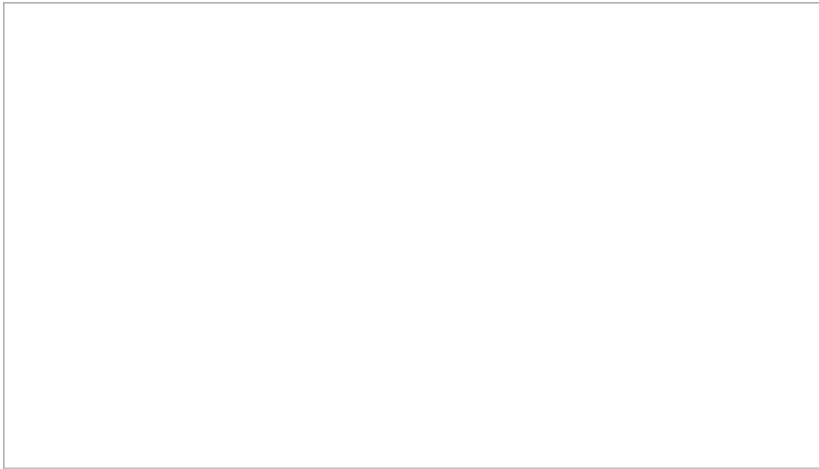


So what do we do now? Lockdown 2

Published 16 days ago by [Mike Porteous](#)



7:00am and all set for a One to One

Staying Safe in Lockdown Swim Technique Session

Well I guess we all knew it was coming, but like me you may be feeling pretty deflated and left with a heaviness about what lies ahead in these newly announced four weeks of lockdown in England and the various restrictions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This post aims to help us have a focus for the coming weeks as the full impact of a second lockdown takes effect. Some suggestions from the first lockdown are summarised, there's a look at what's different this time round and some ideas on what to do.

Where we are

For now any club type gatherings and training sessions, whether out or in doors, are of course all off. The rule of six, with its confusing in/out permutations and seemingly random exceptions, is now down to a simple only exercise with one other outside (or with your household bubble). Despite some well founded lobbying, swimming pools that had only recently re-opened are back to being closed. In the meantime daylight hours are shortening, it's getting colder and all round less inviting for taking permitted daily exercise. And of course the infection rates continue to rise at a frightening rate, one senses though without many people taking in the full severity of what can be involved.

Without in any way wanting to downplay the seriousness of the epidemic and its effects, I think for those of us looking to stay active, healthy and fit, some of what worked first time can still apply. There is also much that is new and worth dwelling on to guide our way forward. And through it all there are some fundamental constants to reiterate, which is where we'll start.

The Constants

The number one priority, that hasn't changed throughout these long uncertain months, is to **stay safe** and act in a way that keeps others safe. As I've written in several posts, this means:

- special attention to eating and sleeping for recovery
- scale back on the high intensity training or anything that leaves your immune system drained out in a puddle of sweat
- and of course maintain a safe and responsible way of being around others

If you were laid up with the virus, I suggest an extra cautious approach to regaining fitness. There is, of course, no evidence available to know of its long term effects. The limited research so far show even the fittest athletes finding their ability to recover from exercise compromised even when they felt ready (and desperate) to return to activity. And Long COVID-19 is now recognised as affecting many people far beyond the supposed one or two weeks of infection. So if this applies to you I'd suggest focusing any activity purely on well being - and nothing that looks, feels or smells like training.

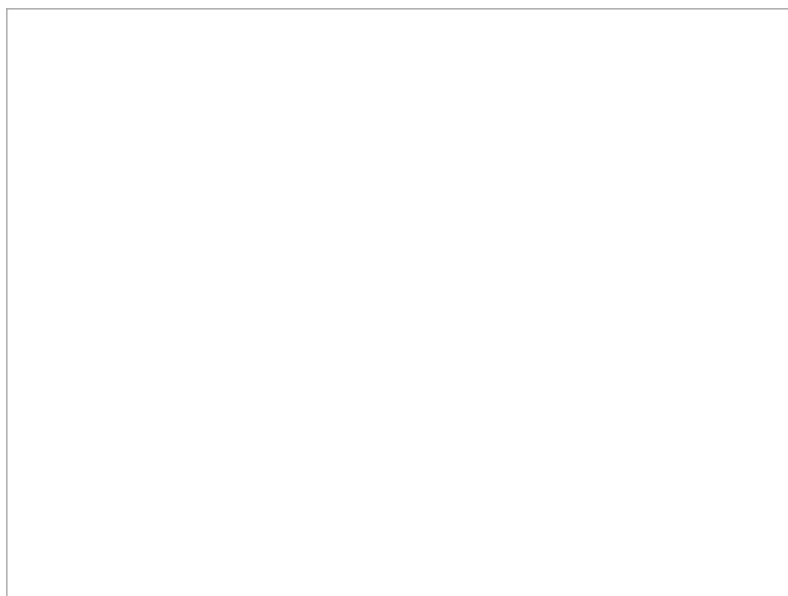
Lessons from Lockdown 1

What seemed to help first time round that we can usefully repeat now? The following draws on many in-depth discussions with other coaches and my own experience:

- **structure**: in the early days of the first lockdown many people found the sudden loss of taken for granted routines very hard to deal with. Establishing a structure for each day definitely helped: for some a detailed timetable of tasks; for others, like me, a more open checklist approach that prioritised certain types of activities each day: learning, relaxing, exercising, connecting, being creative... Not every one of these was accomplished each day. But just the act of giving importance and value to such priorities helped bring a calming focus on what to do, gave a sense of control and helped enrich and ground each day
- **connections**: here many people found that despite - or maybe because of - not being able to physically meet, we gave more time and value to maintaining contacts, maybe renewing connections or getting in touch. And despite initial misgivings, I've found it is possible to develop a close connection with clients, coaches and others without physically meeting - exemplified in David's story where we formed a new and close coaching relationship without ever meeting physically
- **openness to novelty**: initially, when all the pools closed, I resigned myself to not being able to offer any one to one technique sessions for swimmers. Somewhat hesitantly I experimented with taking clients to the sea and nearby river - quickly realising it is perfectly possible and quite fun to put together really worthwhile sessions outside the confines of a pool and without the fancy cameras. Feedback has been great. I know others have found themselves, through force of circumstance, having to be creative and think afresh about the essence of what we do and how it can be delivered in new ways.

What's different this time round?

There are several significant differences this time around, though not least of course the knowledge and experience from what went before.



I think the biggest is a very different mood. Before, the overwhelming feeling was one of **uncertainty**.

Now, if one word could express the whole mix of emotions I think it would be **weariness**. And whereas before a range of positive emotions also seemed to come to the fore - a sense of community, acts of kindness and gratitude - the heaviness seems more pervasive with fewer rays of lightness able to penetrate.

Something else is also at play. In the first lockdown, when events and competitions were at first held in limbo then postponed to next year, there seemed to be a burst of activity: social media full of people tethering themselves to bungee cords to swim in paddling pools, others covering epic distances on indoor bikes or in their back gardens.

In contrast, now the uncertainty of whether events will go ahead next year seems to evoke far less anxiety and desperation to do something - though more from a resigned "who knows" than any confidence in what will be. Perhaps even the most single minded of athletes have also realised they have survived a year without their chosen events taking place.

The predominant mood, alongside weariness, seems to be a kind of resigned low expectation. Hope seems to have ebbed away. Will news of potentially promising vaccines turn all this around?

Energy

For now the value of creating a daily structure, of making time for connections and being open to try the new all hold good once again. Given Lockdown 2's sense of fatigue and apathetic resignation, I think one other key shift of mindset will help: attuning ourselves to and nurturing our inner energy.

By energy I don't mean forcing a hyped up, high intensity, full on activity - if anything it's the opposite. I mean an energy that is drawn from our inner selves and produces a steadying calmness, a sense of constancy amidst all the frustrations and uncertainty around us and that fuels the best in ourselves.

I had a fascinating discussion with Crystal Palace FC Coach Edu Rubio Higuera and one of the founders of an exciting new venture called [My Energy Game](#). This is all about focusing on players' inner energy to raise their game - an in the moment presence that enables them to "live, not just play the game" as he called it.

I can see this not only in those I coach but also in my own coaching - and our interaction creating its own dynamic energy. Pre-lockdown there would be times I turn up to coach a club swim, bike or run session, maybe feeling preoccupied or a bit low. But when I made a conscious decision first to switch my focus to connecting with each person who came and then bring some energy - explaining the purpose of what we'll be doing, how it will help and what we'll be doing in the session - a new level of engagement seemed to take over, animating me and the group. The sessions then flowed.

It's worth saying I don't see this as a "fake it 'til you make it" trick - which I've never agreed with as it feels false and easy to see through. The energy I want to bring is deeper and true to who I am, coming from a place of being aware of how I'm feeling and then consciously deciding to step into the space where my actions can stimulate others.

"Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act."

Rebecca Solnit: Hope in the Dark

So rather than being mired in the weariness and scepticism around us, we can consciously seek out and nurture those things that help draw out and ground us to our own energy - not just going through the motions of each lockdown day but being wholeheartedly present in each moment and feeling alive and well. And as in the Rebecca Solnit quote, seizing the very moment of uncertainty as the space in which we can act and make a difference.

So what do we do?

Enough philosophising! What to do? Here are a set of examples focused on swimming and running that I offer as illustrative prompts to almost any lockdown exercise you might have in mind. I believe they each stimulate and feed off an engaging energy.

Finding Warmth in the Cold

At my Tri Club a few members have been braving the elements to keep up swimming in the sea regularly. Now that this can't be done in anything resembling a group, whether coached or uncoached, we've just revitalised a WhatsApp Group so people can buddy up with one other and dip together. I've also offered to accompany anyone feeling tentative about getting in the water in a safely distanced one to one. And we'll celebrate each episode with our own # (title yet to be settled on) to post up alongside the Outdoor Swimming Society's brilliant #smallswimwins. A Zoom meet up, like sitting round a camp fire, in a few weeks is also on the cards.

So lots of connections, openness to trying new things, mutual support and warm energy to make up for the cold!

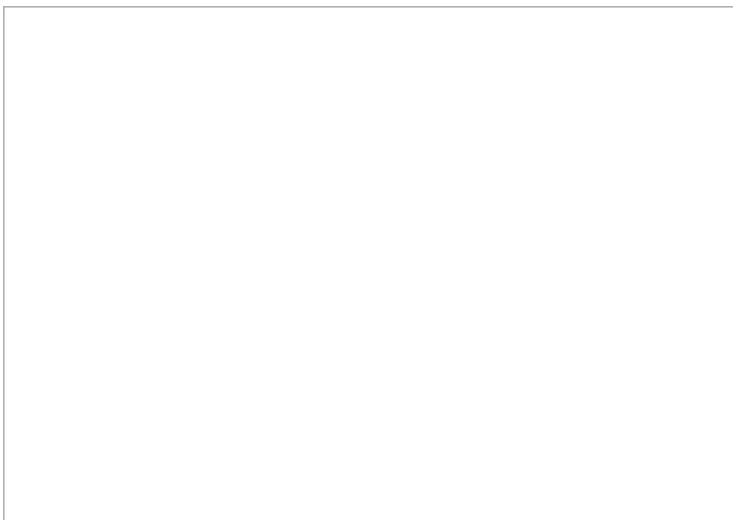
For Swimmers Staying Dry

For those unable or unsure about braving the cold - and getting colder - open water, for these few weeks of lockdown I've suggested establishing a structured approach to daily exercise at home. For one swimmer I'm coaching this has taken the form of practising a short sequence of yoga stretches on alternate days. On the other, alternate days we've designed a routine that starts with some mobility exercises, particularly around the shoulders; then moves to some of the Pilates style strength for the core; then finishes with using stretch cords to work on ingraining the perfect swim technique - as in [this article](#) I wrote for Outdoor Swimming Society's landlocked swimmers.

The idea is to keep everything loose and flexible whilst making sure the right muscles are firing and ready for action when a return to the water is possible. And there's an element of finding alternatives whilst patiently accepting some things can't be done.

Running with the World's Best

And for the lone runners? Here's where a session I created with one of my clients called "Running in the Kenyan Highlands" might offer some ideas. The underlying purpose was to provide some fun around a higher quality session after a day of being locked away in endless Zoom calls - what better than to escape to African highlands with a group of light hearted, light on their feet Kenyan runners?



My client might just be tucked up in at the back, waiting to make his move. Photo from [Kenyan Experience](#)

Imagining himself to be transported to their training camp, the loose format goes something like:

- an easy 5-10mins warm up as everyone chatters away and puts the day's work behind them
- then they very gradually increase the pace over 5mins, with the conversations still going but a bit more subdued
- then, imagining the group all in a line, the runner at the back accelerates to the front and then slows it down and so on. That way my runner gets to have around 3mins of lighter running before putting in around 30secs of striding out to get to the front of the imaginary group. Hold perfect relaxed form so they don't see you straining! And they keep going for 15mins without a break (so around a total of 5 striding to the front efforts)
- then 5mins of easy chatting running to recover before someone (we don't know who but there's always one) starts picking up the pace sensing they're not far from home. The chat stops and for 5mins its strong steady, sustained effort to stay with the group
- then they all slow right down, have a laugh at whoever was crazy enough to push that pace and complete a 5mins easy cool down.

There are many variations - the duration, terrain and size of the imaginary group (so changing the recovery times). My runner has also recently had the honour of running in a Finnish forest with the great Lasse Viren as he relived his epic 1972 Olympics 10kms. But that's another story.

So lots of fun around creating quality workouts without ever getting too intense, some imaginary escapism and visualisation, a focus on pace judgement and attuning oneself to what each effort feels like (without the need of any gadget beeping).

And you? **Please use the Comments box below to share your experience and any ideas for how together we can come through these weeks, staying safe and active.**

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