

Physical injuries and other disruptions—and even some generally positive life changes, such as pregnancy and new motherhood—often bring on bouts of mental injuries or mental illness. These can also occur at any other point in the life of a typical runner. Warning signs to watch out for include feeling hopeless or worthless, not finding joy in your training (or anything else that used to bring you pleasure), withdrawing from your friends and family, or thinking about hurting yourself or other people. If you spot any of these signs, seek help from a counselor, psychologist, social worker, or other mental health professional (your primary care doctor can usually refer you if you don't know where to start). And if you're in crisis, you can always call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 in the United States or chat live at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

## THEN MOVE FORWARD

Once you've allowed yourself a period of mourning and processing, it's time to get real about your next steps. I find the next important phase to be one of gathering information—tracking down as many details as you can to understand the new reality and time frame you're working with and what your process should look like to set and reach new goals.

If you're dealing with injury or illness, you need a qualified health care team (refer back to chapter 8 about building one). Later in this chapter, we also provide more advice on both shorter- and longer-term health conditions.

Every situation is different, but as I work with athletes on navigating setbacks, I have a few rules of thumb I follow. One general guideline is not to cram missed miles into a single day or week because while you might be tempted to make up for what you've missed, doing so can increase your risk of overtraining and injury. Instead, it's almost always better to simply look forward. Table 16.1 can help guide you on exactly how to forge ahead based on how much time you've missed and how close you are to your goal race.

All this assumes that you're going to have ample time to train and recover on the other side of a temporary setback. I know that's not always the case, and if your lifestyle is altered for a significant period of time, you might want to take the last option and run for maintenance and stress relief until you're in a better place to put more emphasis on your running.

Again, this isn't the same as giving up on your goal; it's merely acknowledging reality and shifting your timeline for achieving it. Many athletes who take this approach often find the base mileage they log during a particularly stressful period pays off in even bigger breakthroughs down the line.

**Table 16.1** How to Handle Missed Training

If you miss . . .	Do this . . .
A day or two of training	Just get back on schedule where you are; don't try to make up missed mileage.
More than three days in a row	Ease in with at least one or two easy runs before resuming a training plan as scheduled.
Five runs or more	Ease back in for one to two weeks, starting with easy runs and adjusting your workouts and volume to reduce mileage and intensity.
More than one week	Adjust your expectations for the upcoming month. If you're racing that month, consider altering your time goals or even dropping them altogether and running by feel. If you're two months or more out from a race, however, it won't likely be a setback in the long run—you can keep the same goals for your season.
More than two weeks	Consider shutting down entirely until you're recovered or healed or your circumstances change. Then develop a new plan once you're feeling strong and you've established a new routine.