

COLAS RAIL

# WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

## Karl Reis-Major Shares his Mental Health Journey

Karl Reis-Major, Rail Grinder Manager talks about his own mental health and noticing when he needed to do something different.

Mental health is a topic we talk about a lot within the business, rarely do we get the opportunity to hear from one of our colleagues about their own mental health battles and this month Karl Reis-Major, Rail Grinder Manager took to social media to share his story.

We got in touch to ask him to share his story further:



This is me during a 10-mile Time Trial. Time trailing it's you against the clock the only battle is with yourself to push through pain barriers and to beat any previous times you've done



This was our club's annual charity ride. We rode from Nantwich to London and covered 222 miles in under 14 hours. The sense of achievement riding down Constitutional Hill was overwhelming.

### A bit about Karl:

I'm a keen cyclist and enjoy the freedom it gives me to get out, socialise with likeminded people who have the same passion for a sport / hobby. It also allows me to do my second favourite hobby and spend money as there's nothing better than buying a new set of wheels, or parts upgrade to get the very best out of my many bikes and myself.

### What did it feel like when you realised your mental health needed help?

At the time when I was feeling bad in general, physical and mentally tired as I couldn't separate home and work life.

This created a downhill spiral of a gain in weight and an attitude of "I'll get it back" once I've had this pizza.

The day came when it really struck home that my physical health was bad was whilst out on a club ride, I got dropped by the group ascending a short climb heading into Wales (this is not new) but this time by one of the older guys in the group. That then mentally ruined the remaining 100k left we had to complete and allowed the demons to kick in.

### How were you able to break that cycle?

That evening I booked an appointment with a cycling coach and got my aero bike ready to give me a boost in confidence or just to show how far my levels had dropped over the winter period. That bike only comes out when it's sunny and in the summer. However, it done the trick. We then went out again on our Monday night club ride which is reasonably fast. But that night the placebo affects well and truly kicked in. My average speed went from normally averaging 17-18mph over 40 miles to chucking in an 20mph average over the 40 miles.

Then speaking with the coach about a training structure and sticking to it helped focus the mind to the be more productive both at home and work.

### What changes did you make at work and at home?

In terms of work, it was to allow myself a lunch break instead of just piling through the day. By taking time away from the computer screen it allowed me to come back and tackle whatever task I'm doing with fresher eyes.

Home life was to utilise my time more efficiently, spend quality time with my family instead of burdening them with whatever crisis which was going on with work.

### It can be quite daunting to share your feelings, especially in public, what led you to being open and honest and how did you feel afterwards?

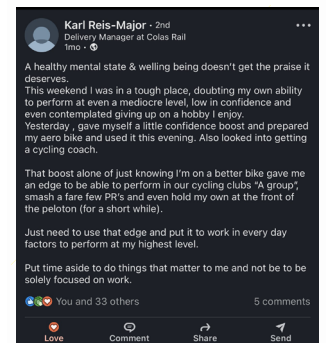
I generally don't post on LinkedIn or one for being part of the "Happy Clappy Brigade" but as we were focusing on mental health and wellbeing at work and delivering those messages to our staff, I felt it appropriate to put something out there as it did feel like a massive turning point for me. Not realising the importance of strong mental wellbeing and again pushing it aside when I really should have done something about it earlier.

The post had some feedback from my peers which was encouraging to have got that out there, which again had a positive effect.

### What advice would you give to people who find themselves feeling the way that you did?

Exercise, taking five are all very important in their own right. Going out on my bike for instance relieves a lot of stress, pent up aggression. That aggression becomes a positive as it allows me push further into my pain threshold go then go further, faster and that there for me is key.

Make sure you take five, focus on your breathing allow your body to relax, go for a walk get that fresh air but at the same time take in the surroundings and see what's there in front of our own eyes.



# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

## BATTLE SCARS: STOPPING SELF HARM STIGMA

[Battle Scars](#) is a support group set up to give advice and raise awareness to anyone affected by self harm and to break the stigmas through education, honesty and openness through workshops and webinars.

Self harm comes in all forms and can be inflicted on the body with immediate and longer term effect, this can physically harming your body through actions (cutting and scratching etc.) or through habits such as eating disorders or alcohol and drug abuse.

But we can cause ourselves psychological harm with ingrained behaviours, this can involved self-neglect, obsessive negative thinking, sabotaging relationships, maintaining a pattern of creating similar damaging relationships etc.

Click on the image below to check out the webinar Battle Scars hosted with the IIRSM, where they cover the range of services they can provide, field a range of questions on self harm and address what self harming means.



### My Whole Self MOT

There are simple steps you can take to look after your whole self. Use this MOT to check in on your own and others' mental health and wellbeing.

**How's my mental health today?**

How do I feel today? Mentally? Physically?

**My Stress Container**

How full is my container? Am I using helpful coping strategies? Are they working? Learn about your Stress Container here.

**My mental health journey**

Our mental health is part of the wider journey of our lives. [Learn more.](#)

**Looking after my wellbeing**

How did I sleep last night? Am I eating a balanced diet and drinking enough water? For tips on supporting your mental health, especially when working from home, look at our [guidance](#).

**How's my thinking today?**

How are my thoughts making me feel? Am I having unhelpful thoughts? Create Your Mind Plan with [Every Mind Matters](#) to get tips to help deal with stress and anxiety and boost your mood.

**What can I do to look after my whole self?**

Write down a few things that you can do to improve your wellbeing. Check in next week to see how you are doing.

Join the campaign for workplace culture change. Check out our resources at [mhfaengland.org](http://mhfaengland.org)

## BOOK YOURSELF IN FOR A MENTAL HEALTH MOT

Regular wellbeing catch-ups with colleagues are a vital way to support people's mental health, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

The team at Mental Health First Aiders England have created a Mental Health MOT, a simple, free guide to help check in on your own and others' mental health and wellbeing.

You can download the [Mental Health MOT guide](#) here and in the image above, make the time today to check in with not just your colleagues, but also yourselves!

## BEAT TECH NECK

Inadequate work desk posture and the constant looking down to view our phones have led to the development of 'Tech Neck', a repetitive stress injury or muscle strain from leaning forward for long periods of time as well as developing hunches in your neck and back.



### Hunching over your mobile can place 27kg of added weight onto your spine

But you can reverse these effects by taking measures, such as ensuring your work desk is adequately set up, taking breaks often, along with [neck exercises](#) to improve your posture. If you suffer from any neck pain please consult with your GP for support.

## USEFUL TOOLS & LINKS

- For non urgent questions on wellbeing email: [wellbeingenquiries@colasrail.com](mailto:wellbeingenquiries@colasrail.com)
- Aviva Wellbeing and Aviva Digital GP App available to all Colas Rail UK staff.
- [Construction Industry Helpline](#) 0345 605 1956
- [Able Futures](#) Helpline 0800 321 3137 (8am to 10.30pm, Monday to Friday)
- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Helpline: 0800 030 5182
- [Top 10 UK Mental Health Charities](#)