

Knitting helps Tom Daley switch off—its mental health benefits are not just for Olympians

August 8 2024, by Michelle O'Shea and Gabrielle Weidemann



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Olympian Tom Daley is the [most decorated diver](#) in Britain's history. He is also an avid knitter. At the Paris 2024 Olympics Daley added a fifth

medal to his collection—and caught the world's attention by knitting a bright blue "Paris 24" jumper while traveling to the games and in the stands.

At the Tokyo Olympics, where Daley was first [spotted knitting](#), he [explained](#) its positive impact on his mental health.

"It just turned into my mindfulness, my meditation, my calm and my way to escape the stresses of everyday life and, in particular, going to an Olympics."

The [mental health benefits of knitting](#) are well established. So why is someone famous like Daley [knitting](#) in public still so surprising?

Knitting is gendered

Knitting is usually associated with women—[especially older women](#)—as a hobby done at home. In a [large international survey](#) of knitting, 99% of respondents identified as female.

But the history of yarn crafts and gender is more tangled. In Europe in the middle ages, [knitting guilds were exclusive](#) and reserved for men. They were part of a respected Europe-wide trade addressing a demand for knitted products that could not be satisfied by domestic workers alone.

The [industrial revolution](#) made the production of cloth goods cheaper and faster than hand-knitting. Knitting and other needle crafts became a leisure activity for women, done in the private sphere of the home.

World Wars I and II turned the spotlight back on knitting as a "patriotic duty", but it was still largely taken up by women.

During COVID lockdowns, knitting saw another [resurgence](#). But knitting still most often makes headlines when men—especially famous men like Daley or actor [Ryan Gosling](#)—do it.

Men who knit are often seen as [subverting](#) the stereotype it's an activity for older women.

Knitting the stress away

Knitting can produce a sense of pride and [accomplishment](#). But for an elite sportsperson like Daley—whose accomplishments already include four gold medals and one silver—its benefits lie elsewhere.

Olympics-level sport relies on perfect scores and world records. When it comes to knitting, many of the mental health benefits are associated with the process, rather than the end result.

Daley [says](#) knitting is the "one thing" that allows him to switch off completely, describing it as "my therapy".

The Olympian says he could "knit for hours on end, honestly. There's something that's so satisfying to me about just having that rhythm and that little "click-clack" of the knitting needles. There is not a day that goes by where I don't knit."

Knitting can create a "flow" state through rhythmic, repetitive movements of the yarn and needle. Flow offers us a [balance](#) between challenge, accessibility and a sense of control.

It's been shown to have benefits relieving stress in high-pressure jobs beyond elite sport. Among surgeons, [knitting has been found](#) to improve well-being as well as manual dexterity, crucial to their role.

For other [health professionals](#)—including oncology nurses and [mental health](#) workers—knitting has [helped to](#) reduce "[compassion fatigue](#)" and burnout. Participants described the soothing noise of their knitting needles. They developed and strengthened team bonds through collective knitting practices.

[Another study](#) showed knitting in primary school may boost children's executive function. That includes the ability to pay attention, remember relevant details and block out distractions.

As a regular creative practice, it has also been [used in the treatment](#) of grief, depression and subduing intrusive thoughts, as well countering chronic pain and cognitive decline.

Knitting is a community

The [evidence](#) for the benefits of knitting is often based on self-reporting. These studies tend to produce consistent results and involve large population samples.

This may point to another benefit of knitting: its social aspect.

Knitting and other yarn crafts can be done alone, and usually require simple materials. But they also provide a chance to socialize by bringing people together around a common interest, which can help [reduce loneliness](#).

The free needle craft database and social network Ravelry contains [more than one million](#) patterns, contributed by users. "Yarn bombing" projects aim to [engage the community](#) and beautify public places by covering objects such as benches and stop signs with wool.

The interest in Daley's knitting online videos have formed a community

of their own.

In them he shows the process of making the jumper, not just the finished product. That includes where he "[went wrong](#)" and had to unwind his work.

His pride in the finished product—a little bit wonky, but "[made with love](#)"—can be a refreshing antidote to the flawless achievements often on display at the Olympics.

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