



CONQUER THE MENTAL GAME

the center for the female athlete

tips

for Managing Performance Anxiety

Just about everyone has felt nervous at some point in their life. For athletes and others in high-pressure situations, this is called performance anxiety. Anxiety is biologically determined and may trigger our need to react, however it can hinder or motivate. We can learn to manage and direct anxiety into focused energy and motivation. Maximize your potential through consistent mental preparation in the week leading up to the big event.

focus on the EFFORT

Reframe your focus towards making consistent progress of improving skills and techniques at every practice and event (e.g., pay attention to your breathing between strokes as a swimmer). As you master the details one at a time, your confidence will build.

Relax your Body

Breathing is an essential component of self-regulation and a first step in relaxing the body. Start by closing your eyes and taking 3 slow deep breaths, starting with a deep inhale through the nose and slow exhale out through the mouth. Continue taking deep breaths until your body is more relaxed.

Throughout the week, try a progressive muscle relaxation. Starting with your feet, focus on the feeling of tension in your muscles. As you exhale, slowly release the tension. Moving up your body, do this with each major muscle group.

Be Mindful

Experiencing anxiety during high-stress situations is a normal part of life. Learn to recognize when anxiety surfaces and respond to it intentionally with the skill S.T.O.P.

STOP what you are doing and put things on pause for a minute

TAKE a breath, breathe naturally; follow your breath entering through the nose and out through the mouth

OBSERVE your thoughts and emotions. Reflect on what is on your mind objectively. Remember, thoughts are not facts, and they are not permanent. Then, notice your body. Are you standing or sitting? How is your posture? Any aches and pains?

PROCEED with something that will support you in the moment. Try talking to a friend, getting a drink of water, or rubbing your shoulders.

Up your Self-Care

Mental and physical fatigue can make it challenging to manage stressors. When anticipating performance anxiety in the coming week, make an effort to take care of yourself. Decline additional commitments that leave you feeling drained. Eat balanced meals and get adequate sleep.

Stay Positive

Recognizing and reinforcing what went well during a game or competition promotes healthy self-esteem and lessens the negative thoughts. Briefly offer constructive feedback about areas for growth.

If you or an athlete you know is struggling with persistent anxiety or depression, seeking help from a licensed therapist is advised.

Content adapted from:

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