

## STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR THE ATHLETE

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### Abstract

Everyone experiences stress. Athletes are no exception. Not only do athletes have to worry about lifestyle and emotional stress, they also have to worry about training and competition stress. But how do athletes know if they are under stress?

Quite simply, an athlete with a manageable training schedule and stress load will be full of energy and will perform well. An athlete who is stressed, on the other hand, will seem listless and without a competitive edge. They may have trouble eating and sleeping, and they will be more susceptible to injuries and illnesses.

### Introduction

#### Stress make Work For You

It is proven that a certain amount of stress is beneficial to an athlete. A small amount of stress helps us focus, and often allows us to perform with an extra surge of energy. And while an athlete can handle stress better than a non-athlete because he or she is naturally trained to handle pressure, over-training or competing too much can damage years of hard work.

This is because our bodies can't differentiate between performance stress and lifestyle stress. Too much stress has a direct effect on hormonal balance, and eventually stress affects our entire metabolism and immune system.

Therefore, athletes must be careful to achieve a good balance by maintaining a high level of fitness without going over their physical and mental limits. Since the body perceives all stress as the same, athletes who want to perform their best should make sure their lives outside of their sports are stress-free and manageable as well. Stress is impossible to avoid. But it can be managed, and if mastered, work to our advantage.

*"Stress is like spice. in the right proportion it enhances the flavor of a dish. Too little produces a bland, dull meal; too much may choke you." ~Donald Tubesing"*

Factors which can increase stress and anxiety athletes are: physical demands, psychological demands, expectations and pressure to perform to a high standard, and life direction concerns.

Healthy ways for athletes to deal with stress are to engage in pleasurable activities, get efficient rest, maintain a positive perspective, laugh, and strengthen their social relationships.

#### Manage Training Stress

A big mistake that athletes make is to train too hard too fast. Instead, training should be gradually progressive. Make sure the body can handle its current load before you increase the load, and always give the body adequate rest between sessions. Learn to break up the monotony of your training by choosing a different sport one or two times each week. The health benefits would still be there, while mentally this provides a break from training for a big event.

A great stress reliever is yoga. Often overlooked by those in the fitness community, practicing yoga can provide countless mental and physical benefits. Yoga increases core strength, flexibility, and concentration. Some other little-known benefits of regular yoga practice include lower blood pressure, better lung function, and improved posture. All of these are important for athletes. Also, learn to utilize humour to relax and place your sport in a reasonable and positive perspective.

### **Manage Competition Stress**

If you find competition stressful, you shouldn't avoid it, you should select it more carefully. You'll have more success if you plan your competitions so that the challenge increases each time out. As an athlete, your confidence and self-esteem will grow every time you are successful. There will be times you will be unsuccessful as well, and these should be recognized as great learning experiences.

*"If your teeth are clenched and your fists are clenched, your lifespan is probably clenched." ~Terri Guillemets"*

### **Manage Everyday Life Stress**

Someone who is moving, breaking up with a significant other, or going through other life-changing events will experience stress which will likely have an effect on athletic performance. Since there is no way to really get rid of the stress, the best way to combat it is to cut down on stress in other areas. If lifestyle stress is high, consider cutting down on competition, and see training as therapy. Never completely avoid physical exercise when you are stressed.

Especially during tough times, athletes should exercise at least 30 minutes a day five days a week. Always monitor your eating and sleeping patterns, which have a direct effect on stress. Eat healthy and get the correct amount of sleep. Regular patterns will help keep your stress level in check.

### **Conclusion**

Stress management techniques need to be directed at individual needs and the issue at hand, as well as take into account the coping resources the athlete has available. As with the acquisition of any skill, application of stress management techniques requires training, time, and practice. Knowledge is not sufficient, as it does not guarantee an athlete can apply the necessary skills or program to his or her specific issue. Application and practice are necessary, and effort is needed on the part of the athlete to make gains in stress management ability.

**References:**

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