

ANXIETY AFFECTS SPORTS PERFORMANCE

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Introduction:

Anxiety is a mild fear reaction toward some stimulus. Anxiety is prevalent in even the best of athletes due to the immense pressures associated with professional sports.

It is important to define certain terms related to the study of anxiety and performance. This is particularly important for studying anxiety because the stimulus is predictable and controlled in contrast to unpredictable and uncontrolled. These operational definitions are important to note when reading studies that have been conducted (as you will see below) and when conducting your own studies. You should use these terms when writing about the studies you read about.

Why do we get anxious/nervous?

Why do we get nervous? Everyone experiences anxiety and nervousness to some extent; however, this reaction is not always consistent with everyone. Essentially, when faced with this certain stimulus, the pituitary gland sends a signal to the adrenal gland on the kidney. Here, adrenaline is released. Primarily, adrenaline will activate your fight or flight response increasing your heart rate, dilating your pupils, directing of blood and energy to the important organs of the body. There are degrees to which this response is activated. You can have minor fight or flight response (perhaps on a first date) or a more major one (from a attack). This is the nervous feeling that we get.

How Does Anxiety Affect Sports Performance?

Performance anxiety is common in sports, as to some extent, fear of performance helps in achieving desired concentration. However, the excess will lead to a rush of adrenaline termed as anxiety. Whenever athletes feel short of breath, sweating, shaking or high heart beat rate, will lose concentration, her/his actions become disjointed and athletes feel paralyzed at the beginning of an important sporting event. These are symptoms of performance anxiety athletes no longer feel confident in himself and do not believe that he will be able to accomplish anything successful. To deal with such thoughts he must learn how to manage anxiety and to do so, it is imperative to understand how sports performance and anxiety are interrelated.

Anxiety affects a sports players' performance in physiological, cognitive and behavioral ways. If he suffer from anxiety before an important athletic competition, his sports performance will be affected. When athlete body is tense and blood pressure high, it is difficult for his body to move in a fluid and coordinated manner. Athlete actions will be jerky and misplaced, affecting his performance in a negative manner. Listed below are the ways in which anxiety can affect sports performance.

1. Fear

When the athlete is afraid of a certain situation, he may experience body paralysis once he finds himself present in that situation. This indicates severe anxiety. An example of this is when an athlete suffers from stage fright, which they may experience right before a large, public competition. When feeling overwhelming fear, the athlete may be unable to move, talk or act at all.



2. Unable to Concentrate

Pre-competitive anxiety also develops as an inability to concentrate before an upcoming event or competition. The athlete is unable to concentrate on the task at hand and therefore cannot give their performance full attention. The root cause of the inability to concentrate is feelings of apprehension.

Apprehensions cause the individual to feel that they will fail or decrease their confidence in their ability.



3. Sweating

The anxiety makes the athlete over conscious of his situation and the apprehensions make him feel uneasy. As a result, the body may feel sudden bursts of heat and will release a lot of perspiration when the body receives signals from the brain. Excessive sweating can occur anywhere on the body but mainly on the hands and the face. The individual will begin to feel uncomfortable and this merely reinforces the anxiety they are already feeling.



4. Racing Heart

As a result of anxiety the heart rate of an athlete may also increase manifold. This may be due to the excessive release of adrenaline in the body. Increased heart rates are also related to panic. If the athletes become increasingly panicked, the heart rate will also increase.



5. Shortness of Breath

Breathing very fast or panting (Breathless) is another symptom of anxiety. Sometimes the athletes experience a shortness of breath and struggle to take in oxygen. It is common for athletes to hyperventilate due to severe anxiety. This in turn can deprive the brain of enough oxygen, which would lead to dizziness and/or fainting.



6. Dizziness

When an athlete is suffering from severe anxiety and is panicking, the brain may not receive as much blood and oxygen as it normally does. This results in dizziness, which if severe can result in the athlete fainting. Feelings of dizziness can disable the athlete to such an extent that they may be unable to perform.



7. Shaking

Before a competition or important event, an athlete may experience severe shaking of the hands or knees. This is due to an increased spike of adrenaline in the body, which is brought on by severe anxiety. If the anxiety persists, the body may collapse.

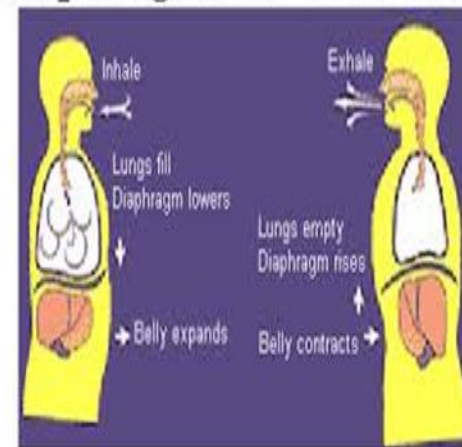


How to Prevent Anxiety in Sports Performance:

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing

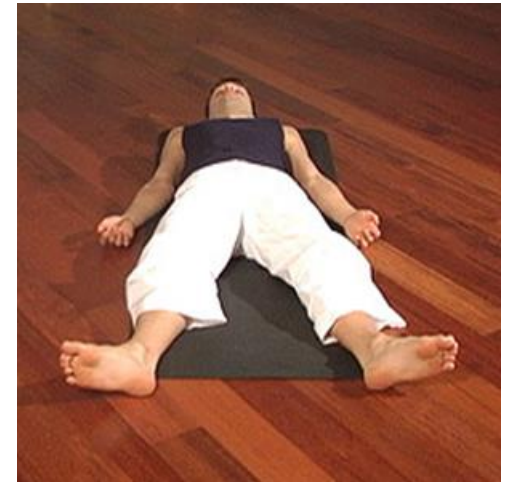
The diaphragm is a muscle between the chest and the stomach cavity. The breathing done by contracting this muscle is known as diaphragmatic breathing. It requires simple practice to learn and then it should be repeated several times daily. The link will guide you to learn the technique.

Diaphragmatic Breathing



2. Relaxation Technique

When the athlete feels the symptoms of anxiety such as increased heart rate, increased blood pressure or difficult breathing, a relaxation technique can help in controlling the anxiety. In one relaxation technique, the athlete is asked to lie down in a darkened room and think about relaxing his body from the outside inward. As a result, the blood pressure, breathing and heart rate normalizes. If the anxiety attack is more severe, then massaging the body can relax the individual to a great extent.



3. Visualization

Visualization is a technique, used by the athletes to control their anxiety. In this technique one visualizes himself in a situation similar to the actual event. The athlete visualizes himself winning in front of the entire crowd where the event is to take place. Below are more ways you can use visualization to combat performance anxiety.



Visualizing Yourself

This is one of the exercises of visualization in which athlete visualizes themselves. The athlete is asked to visualize every physical aspect of their body with their eyes closed. While visualizing the body, the athlete tells himself that each of these body parts is fine and in good working condition.

Visualizing Game

Another exercise requires the athlete to visualize the actual sport they are to play. The athlete visualizes the events starting from the preparations before going onto the field and the first move, and finally the victory.

Visualizing Opponents

So far, have visualized himself and game. In this exercise the athlete is now required to imagine how he sees his opponent playing. While visualizing his opponent's moves, he is supposed to tell himself that his moves are better than his opponent, and visualize how he should combat his opponents' moves.

4. Muscle Relaxation.

Anxiety results in stiffness of the muscles. Muscle relaxing practices are done to avoid this happening during the actual game. In this technique, the athlete tenses a particular muscle of the leg, abdomen, hands or face for 10 seconds with the eyes closed. After 10 seconds of tension, 20 seconds of relaxation should be practiced before moving to the next muscle.



5. Focusing on What Can Be Controlled

Athletes should remind themselves that they are better trained; they have developed better techniques, but should not try to control things that are not in their control such as the audience or the opponent.

Conclusion:-

The anxiety has had a considerable impact on performance, it is important to consider other components of an athlete's functioning as well. The mental health model of Performance does this by using the Profile of Mood States. The peak performances are achieved by an individual who poses psychological states with high levels of vigor and low levels of tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion. Is one method for differentiating between successful and unsuccessful performers? It is therefore necessary to consider all aspects of an individual's psychological functioning if sport psychologies are to have a maximum impact.

THANK YOU