

Mindfulness for Athletic Performance

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Monument Health Neuropsychology



Identify manifestations of anxiety in athletes



Review the effects of anxiety on performance



Learn how to use mindfulness to facilitate the 'flow state'

Objectives

Faces of Anxiety

Externalized

- Restless, Shaking, fidgeting
- Flushed face
- Stuttering
- Rapid speech
- Tangential thoughts
- Excessive sweating
- Irritability
- Indecisiveness

Internalized

- IBS
- Urinary frequency
- Muscle tension or tension headaches
- Dry mouth
- Uncomfortable being still
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Perfectionism
- Self-criticism

Impact of Sport Related Anxiety



INCONSISTENCIES IN
ATHLETIC
PERFORMANCE



FEELINGS OF
WORTHLESSNESS



PHYSICAL/EMOTIONAL
EXHAUSTION



REDUCED SENSE OF
FULFILLMENT



IMPAIRED
CONCENTRATION

Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS)

- **Somatic anxiety**
 - My body feels tense, jittery, clammy, heart racing
- **Worry about performance**
 - Self-doubts, fear of disappointing others
- **Concentration disruption**
 - Mind wandering, rumination on past mistakes

Self- consciousness and Fear

- Perfectionism is always rooted in fear
- Actively worrying about screwing up makes you more likely to screw up.
- The inner monologue matters:
 - Am I doing this right?
 - What if I make a fool out of myself?
 - Does my form look off?
 - Do I look stupid?
 - What will my team think if I screw this up?
 - I don't want to lose my spot as a starter.
- fMRI studies show neurological difference between worry/self-monitoring versus living in the moment
- Those in the moment reveal “efficient and streamlined” neural activity, only using the parts of brain relevant to strong performance

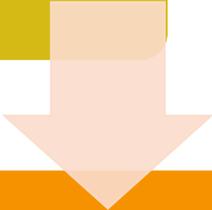


The Relationship with Anxiety

It's possible to change our relationship with anxiety.



This will calm the perceived threat and eventually decrease the overall anxiety



Rather than worry about outcomes, focus on the task at hand (be in the moment)

Thoughts are NOT Facts

Our own appraisal of our challenges, not only defines athletic performance, but our entire lives

Viewing challenges as opportunities versus barriers

Often our biggest challenges are our
THOUGHTS



We don't have to jump on board!



The Role of Mindfulness

At the least, sports performance is 50% mental

Pressure from coaches, family, peers, fans, and self creates distractions and feeds internal judgment

Mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice

Strength Training for the Brain

Benefits of Mindfulness for Sports

Improves ability to control thoughts

Increases connection between brain and body

Helps to avoid distractions

Decreases pain sensitivity

Improves athletic resilience/adaptation to disappointments

Reduces performance stress/anxiety

Improves recovery time

Lowers resting heart rate

Improves concentration

Increases energy for task at hand

Boosts confidence

Promotes a sense of self-control and emotional balance

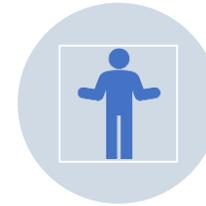
Improves psychological flexibility

Improves ability to stay “in the zone”

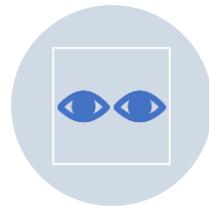
Athletes “In the Zone”



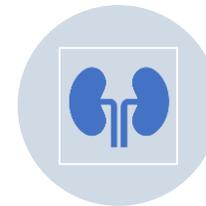
Lost awareness of time:
athletes experiencing flow
describe how the clock
seemed to slow down



Self-consciousness fades:
indifference to the crowd



***Focused purely on the
present moment:*** intense
focus on the task



Work is fluid and effortless:
experiences seem easy and
free of thought, the body
leads

Flow State

- Transient Hypofrontality

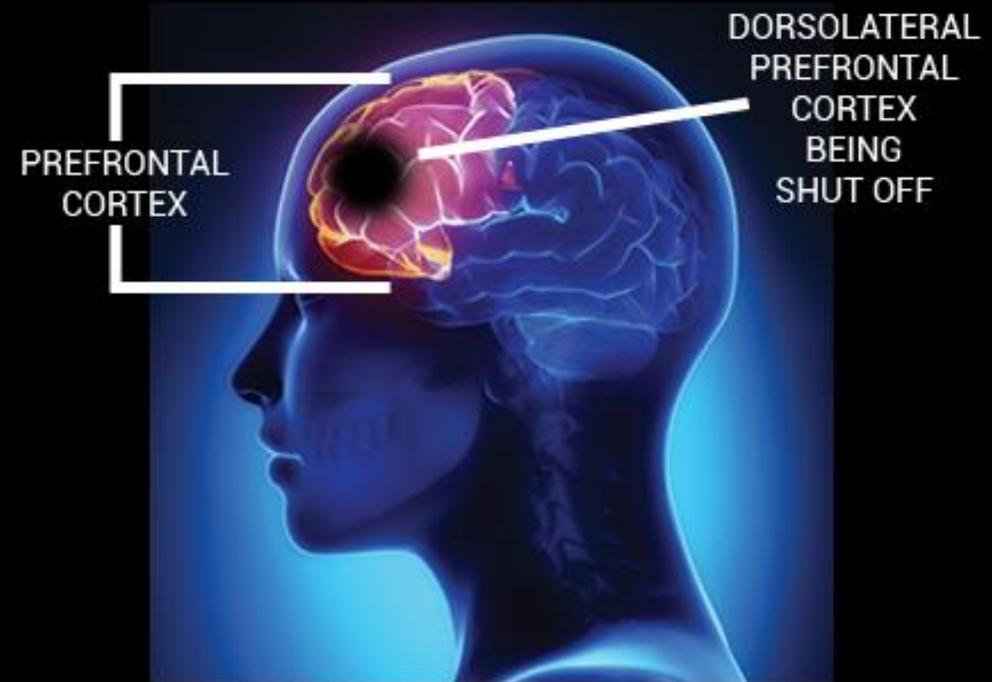
Transient = temporary Hypo = slowing down Frontality = frontal cortex

- Overanalyzing stops and inner monologue is paused
- Results in heightened performance and exhilaration
- Mental state of operation in which a person is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and *enjoyment in the process* of the activity (rather than the outcome)

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BRAIN IN BETA (NORMAL STATE) AND BRAIN IN TRANSIENT HYPOFRONTALITY (FLOW STATE)



BRAIN IN BETA (NORMAL STATE)



BRAIN IN TH (FLOW STATE)

Reaching the Flow State

- Connecting to clear purpose, goals, and steps toward goals
- Confidence that skills align with goals
- Feeling control over the situation
- Concentration/focus on present moment
- Doing what you LOVE

Self reported higher levels of productivity, creativity, and happiness up to three days after flow state

Nine Dimensions of the Flow State

Challenge-skill
balance

Clear goals

Sense of control

Unambiguous
feedback

Autotelic
experience

Total concentration

Loss of self-
consciousness

Action-awareness
emerging

Transformation of
time

Default Mode Network

Brain allowed to wander

Daydreaming, making plans

Often occurs while walking or during menial tasks

Associated with attentional lapses, anxiety, and ADHD

Facilitates recovery to overcome stress

Associated with heightened creativity

Primes for social interactions



Meditation and the DMN

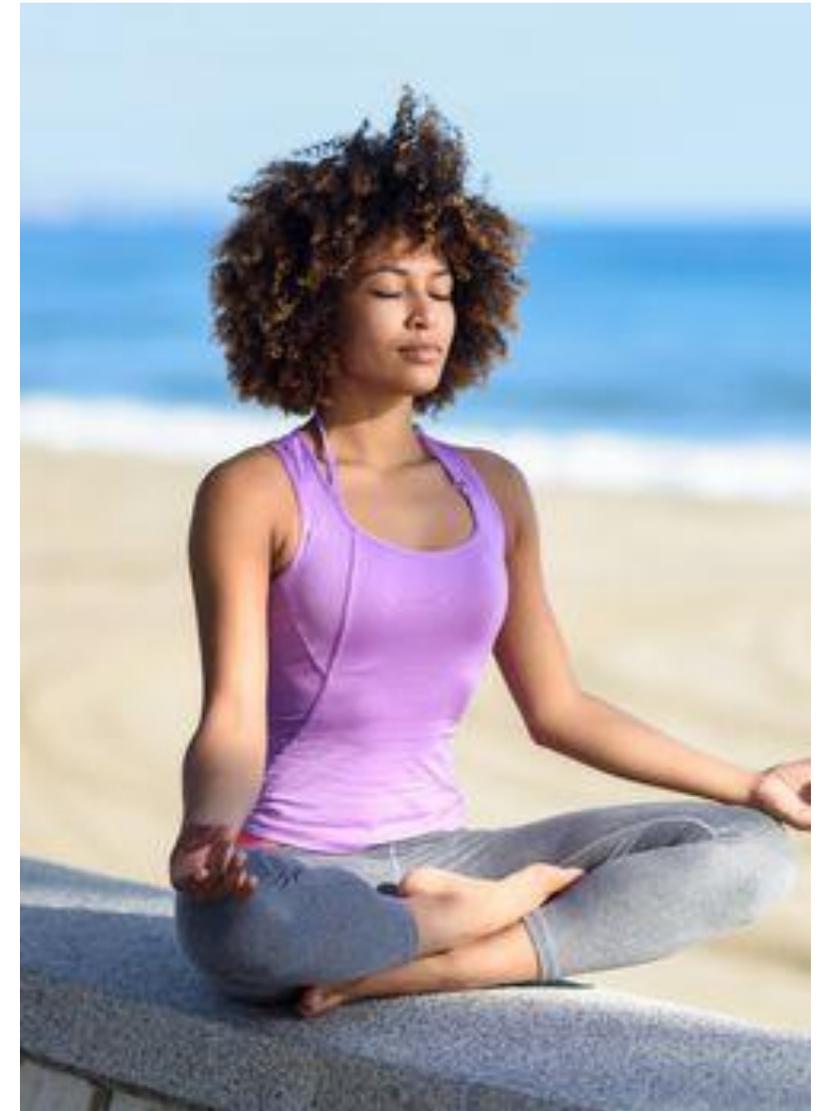
Components to Meditation:

Maintaining attention on immediate experience

Maintaining attitude of acceptance toward the experience

Repeated meditation practice transforms resting state (DMN) into more present-centered and content state

Non-judgmental approach to experiences changes relationship with thoughts, shifts that relationships during default mode

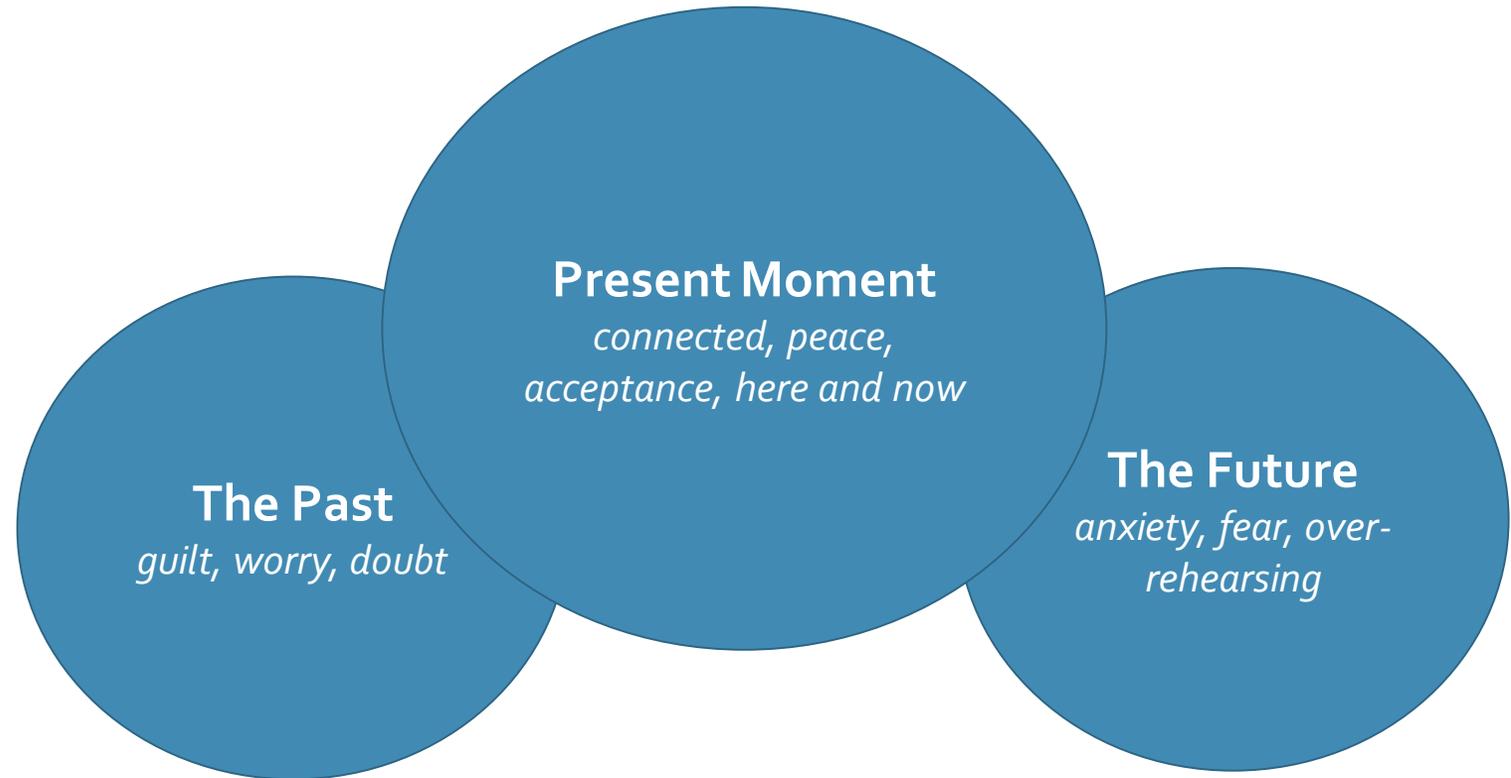


Mindfulness Meditation Guidelines

Mindfulness = non-judgmental present-moment awareness

- **Stopping thoughts is not the goal.** The goal is to be aware of thoughts, nonjudgmentally
- **The mind will wander during meditation practice.**
- **As your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the present moment.**
- **Don't judge yourself for your wandering mind.** When you judge, your mind is in the past.
- **Use your breath as an anchor to the present moment.**

Circles of Attention



When your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the middle circle using an anchoring breath

Facilitating Flow State

Give immediate feedback

Use calm, deep voice

Listen closely

Encourage open communication

Notice your body language

Help them recognize how their skills align with goals

Positive energy – flow state must involve doing what we love

Drive attention into the NOW



Perfectionism is a form of anxiety. It is rooted in fear. It inhibits performance.



Mindfulness meditation involves noticing thoughts in a nonjudgmental manner.



Mindfulness meditation practices decrease performance anxiety by changing relationship with thoughts.



Repeated exposure to mindfulness meditation practices increases the chance of reaching the flow state.

Key Points

References

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Questions?
Thoughts?
Discussion?

