

# Stress Recognition & Control

Athletics is demanding often requiring year-round commitment, hard work, and self-sacrifice to consistently perform at a high level in changing competitive circumstances. The unique demands of different sports (performance expectations, long practices, infrequent days off, changing schedules, travel, family separations, lack of privacy, media attention, exhaustion, & injury) must be managed against other priorities in life such as relationships, family, children, financial security, and future education/career planning. There may be times during the playing season when the demands of life and the sport temporarily exceed a player's ability to cope and performance suffers. Recognizing the early symptoms of stress is often the first step in preventing reduced performance while maintaining general functioning.

## **Self-scoring test for gauging stress and tension levels** (Circle the appropriate number in each item)

	<b>Behavior</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>A few times a week</b>	<b>Rarely</b>
1	I feel tense, anxious, or have nervous indigestion.	2	1	0
2	People at work/home make me feel tense	2	1	0
3	I eat/drink/smoke in response to tension.	2	1	0
4	I have tension or migraine headaches, or pain in the neck or shoulders, or insomnia.	2	1	0
5	I can't turn off my thoughts at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day.	2	1	0
6	I find it difficult to concentrate on what I'm doing because of worrying about other things.	2	1	0
7	I take tranquilizers (or other drugs) to relax.	2	1	0
8	I have difficulty finding enough time to relax.	2	1	0
9	Once I find the time, it is hard for me to relax.	Yes 1		No 0
10	My workday is made up of many deadlines.	Yes 1		No 0

## Self-scoring test for gauging stress levels in others

*(Circle the appropriate number in each item)*

	<b>Behavior</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b> (Once/wk)	<b>Often</b> (Almost daily)	<b>Very Frequently</b> (> Once/day)
1	Activity: eats and/or moves fast	0	1	2	3
2	Talking: speaks fast, in an explosive manner, interrupts, repeats self.	0	1	2	3
3	Listening: inattentive, must have things repeated.	0	1	2	3
4	Worries: concerned about small issues that he / she can't control.	0	1	2	3
5	Anger/hostility: gets mad easily at self and / or others.	0	1	2	3
6	Impatience: tries to hurry others and/or becomes frustrated with own pace.	0	1	2	3

## Simplified self-scoring test for gauging stress and tension in self/others

Maximum total score = 18.	The total score is _____.
<b><u>Score</u></b>	<b><u>Stress/tension level</u></b>
14-18	Considerably above average
9-13	Above average
5-8	Average
3-4	Below average
0-2	Considerably below average

### Facts About Stress

- \*Stress is necessary for survival
- \*Stress is necessary for human growth & development
- \*Stress is initially positive, but too much is unhealthy
- \*Stress is additive
- \*Stress is time-limited and manageable
- \*Stress is usually a normal reaction to an abnormal situation

Stressors cluster into two main categories: physical and mental. Awareness of the different types of stressors can lead to specific reduction strategies. For example, maintaining fluid intake on long road trips can prevent dehydration or avoidance of excessive stimulant use (ie caffeine, nicotine) or alcohol use (ie 3 or more drinks) can prevent insomnia or delayed adjustment to jet lag.

## Types of Physical & Mental Stressors

Physical Stressors	Mental Stressors
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Environmental</b></p> <p>Physical Work Heat, Cold, Wetness Bright Lights, Darkness Noise, Excitement, Crowds Travel, Jet Lag Infection, Toxic Agents</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Physiological</b></p> <p>Sleep Debt Dehydration, Poor Nutrition Poor Hygiene Illness or Injury Over or Under Use of Muscles Fatigue Substance Use (alcohol, tobacco, etc)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cognitive</b></p> <p>Information (too much or too little) Sensory Overload versus Deprivation Time Pressure versus Waiting Uncertainty, Unpredictability Hard Choices versus No Choices Recognition of Impaired Performance</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Emotional</b></p> <p>Fear/Anxiety from Threats of Injury, Disease, Pain, Loss, or Failure Grief From Important Losses Resentment, Anger, Rage Producing Frustration and Guilt Boredom Producing Inactivity Conflicting Demands (home versus job) Interpersonal Feelings (rejection, shame) Temptation Causing Loss of Faith</p>

There are four common reactions to high stress levels: anxiety, depression, aggression, and somatic (physical). Most individuals will have one main type of reaction, but a mixture of symptoms from several reactions types is possible. Fatigue, irritability, sleep problems (too much or too little), increased substance use (alcohol, tobacco), and a change in activity level (overactive versus social isolation) are often common to all four reaction types.

### Four Common Reaction Patterns to High Stress Levels

<p><b>Anxiety:</b> trembling or shaking or restlessness, pounding or racing heart, sweating, shortness of breath or smothering, chest pain or discomfort, feelings of choking, nausea or abdominal distress, dizziness, unsteadiness, or lightheadedness, feelings of unreality, fear of losing control or going crazy, fear of dying, numbness or tingling sensations, chills or hot flushes, difficulty concentrating or mind going blank, muscle tension, irritability.</p>
<p><b>Depression:</b> sad/empty feelings, irritability, tearfulness/crying spells, reduced interest/pleasure in daily activities, weight loss/weight gain, difficulty falling or staying asleep, excessive sleep, reduced ability to think/concentrate, indecisiveness, feelings of worthlessness/hopelessness, loss of energy, guilt, recurrent thoughts of death/dying (including suicidal thinking), social isolation, low self-esteem</p>
<p><b>Aggression:</b> anger, frustration, temper tantrums, irritability, increased muscle tension, tremulousness, interpersonal conflict or confrontations, critical of others, short fuse, inability to relax, headaches, jaw aches, repetitive thinking, poor concentration, blaming others</p>
<p><b>Somatic (physical):</b> headaches, neck/backaches, joint pains, weakness, muscle tension/soreness/twitching, lump in the throat, nausea, vomiting, reduced appetite, diarrhea, constipation, bloating, stomach pain, acid reflux, dizziness, numbness, tingling, shortness of breath, decreased interest in sex, erectile or ejaculatory dysfunction, urinary frequency or retention, blurred vision, double vision, skin rash</p>

Fortunately, high stress levels are usually temporary and the common stress reactions that interfere with general functioning and athletic performance will decrease over time. There are many strategies, however, for managing the common stressors and preventing stress reactions from lasting too long or interfering too much. Some of the most useful strategies are listed below.

- (1) Recognize symptoms of stress early:**
- (2) Maintain aerobic fitness:**
- (3) Use relaxation techniques to unwind:**
- (4) Make yourself look calm and in control:**
- (5) Talk about your stressors-put them into perspective:**
- (6) Develop a support network**
- (7) Ask for help:**
- (8) Avoid excessive tobacco or alcohol use:**
- (9) Develop a priority or task completion list:**
- (10) Keep busy when not resting:**
- (11) Get at least four continuous hours of sleep each nite:**
- (12) Learn from those who manage stress well:**
- (13) Draw support from your family:**
- (14) Improve time management skills:**
- (15) Take regular short breaks from the demands of work:**
- (16) Stay informed-get the facts-ignore rumors:**
- (17) Consider a spiritual or religious solution:**

**Psychological** symptoms are evident in feelings and in thinking patterns anxiety, restlessness, worry, fear, tension, irritability, difficulty concentrating, problems in memory or understanding things, moodiness, depression, fatigue, sadness, loneliness, low motivation or energy, defensiveness, blaming others, scapegoating, obsessive (repetitive) thinking.

**Physical** symptoms run the whole gamut of body aches and pains: backache, headache, muscle aches, digestive problems, sleeping problems, palpitations, tightness of muscles of the stomach or jaw, dizziness, skin rash, sexual dysfunction, illness.

**Behavioral** signs and symptoms are evident in daily personal activities: increased eating, smoking, or drinking; general restlessness with tapping of fingers or foot, grinding teeth, or nail biting; procrastination; diminished productivity or efficiency; being late; skipping work; being snappish; having accidents.

**Interpersonal** signals are evident in relationships with other people: difficulty maintaining good relationships, short temper, diminished patience and difficulty listening to other, withdrawal from others, avoidance of social activities, marital and family problems.