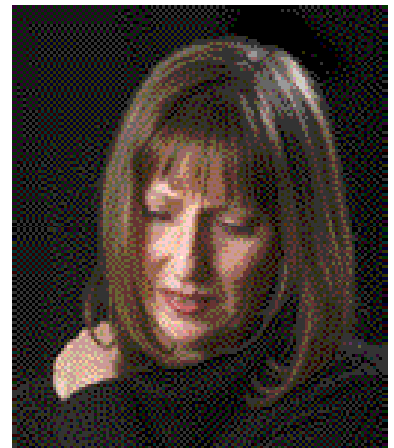




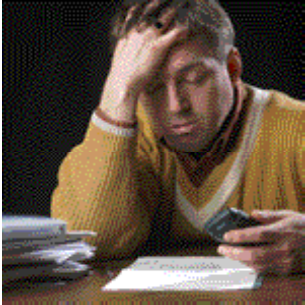
All About Stress



All About Stress

This section of the Guide is probably the most important chapter you will read. To show you how important learning about stress is to you as an athlete, here's a short story.

Paul's Story



Paul is a junior in high school. A three-sport athlete, Paul runs cross-country in the Fall; hurdles as part of the indoor track team, and is a star pitcher for the baseball team in the Spring.

During his indoor track season, Paul suffered a hamstring pull. It was the last straw for Paul. For the past year, he had suffered a variety of muscle pulls and strains, in addition to bad headaches and experiencing poor performance. Yet he was a very good athlete and student. He trained every day; worked out in the weight room, studied hard, and was gathering lots of college catalogs as he started thinking about where he would go to college. He had no idea what he wanted to study, but he knew he wanted to play a sport. Baseball was his best bet, he thought. But now he had hurt himself again. No one would want him.

Sound familiar?

When Paul came to see us for help with his hamstring, it was pretty obvious that Paul's problems had something to do with stress. As we reviewed the last six months with Paul including each injury, it became very clear that Paul's stress was having a major effect on his body.

That's right!!

Stress was affecting the way Paul performed.

Paul's hamstring injury healed, but more importantly, Paul learned some very simple techniques to lower his stress. Within two weeks, Paul was back in top form. He was a division champ in the hurdles, helping his team to the #1 spot in their league. He is ready to do his best in the upcoming baseball season.

At the same time, Paul is checking with his counselor more often; has developed a plan to choose a college; and is working with us to keep his body in top condition



If you read nothing else in this Guide, read and understand the next few pages. We will be defining stress and how it hinders performance and health. We will give you some tools to help you manage and reduce stress, and we will help you learn where your stress comes from and what to do about it.

This information is vitally important, not just for performance in your sport, but also for your entire life. Once you learn these techniques, you may even be able to help your family and friends reduce their stress thereby improving their own lives and health.

The Student/Athlete Educational Foundation, Inc., offers a "Recovery-Stress" Questionnaire. This self-test can help you determine where your stress originates. There are 14 different ways stress can interrupt your life. This Questionnaire helps you find out where your stress is coming from.

Contact SAEF at
stress@chap.com
for more information about this
important tool.

What is stress?

It is a simple fact that stress is a part of our everyday lives. Some stress is ok like the stress you feel when the alarm clock rings and you have to rush to get ready for school. Stress helps you perform, study, prepare breakfast, and get out of the way of harm.

So the real issue is not stress itself....but how much stress you have in your life and how you manage it.

You have all learned ways to try manage your stress but most of the time your methods don't help. They just make it worse. You try to push thoughts about things you need to do out of our heads. You try to rest. You try to forget about things. You try not to think about that event tomorrow. You try to get rid of stress by eating too much or by being angry or grouchy or by avoiding certain people or things. You don't appreciate the good things. Everything is negative. You get a cold or flu; your head aches; we get a stiff neck; your whole body starts to hurt.

Stress can be a killer....

**Stress can kill your training efforts,
your practice sessions,
your competition,
your grades,
your friendships,
your body,
your future
Your energy is sapped.
You are exhausted all the time.**

If you think about it, you always know when you are stressed. Your body feels different – tight, sore, out of sorts. Everything becomes an effort. You begin to “trash talk” to yourself. You are not happy.



Do You feel like this sometimes??



The Stress Response

These body changes are universal for all people who are stressed. This is called the “flight-or-fight” response. The physical responses to

stress prepare you to run away from an enemy or stay and fight it. This “flight-or-fight” response helps you get ready do deal with what you perceive as a threat...like the coach yelling at you.

There's a problem with all this. Your body and mind have no idea what the threat is. It could be a bear running after you or it could be that you are late for practice. So your body prepares you for any response. Here's what happens in a matter of seconds:

This stress response affects you on all levels – emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, physically. Decisions you may make while under stressful conditions may not be the most appropriate.

What Happens during Flight or Fight

Your heart pumps faster to get more blood to your muscles.

Your blood pressure rises as your arteries narrow and your heart beats faster

Your breathing becomes faster to move more oxygen to your blood

Your muscles tense up to get ready for action. You may feel a muscle spasm

Your digestion stops so more blood is available for your brain and muscles ou sweat more to cool off your body

Your pupils get bigger and your sense of smell and hearing become stronger

Your immune system, which protects you from infection, becomes compromised

Read on....

Stress can be divided into two categories.

Type 1 Stress

Type 1 Stress occurs when the source of the stress is immediate and identifiable and can be resolved in a very short time. An example of Type 1 stress would be if you were mountain climbing and lost your footing. Your body goes into immediate Type 1 stress and you get your footing back and begin to relax. This type of stress may also be pleasurable as when you are skiing downhill at a very fast pace.

Type 2 Stress

Type 2 Stress is long-term stress. This type of stress occurs when the source of your stress is unclear, less immediate, and sometimes not even recognizable. This is the kind of stress most of us experience. This is not good stress. An example of Type 2 stress would be trying to deal with an athletic injury or worrying that you may fail an exam at school or that you may never get into the college you desire.

Type 2 stress can lead to all kinds of physical as well as psychological symptoms. Some symptoms include:

- An increase in muscle tension can result in muscle tightness, back pain and/or chronic headache.
- Changes in breathing can result in shortness of breath or rapid, shallow breathing
- An increased heart beat can lead to rapid heart beat, a scary situation
- Increased brain activity can lead to anxiety, a lack of focus, racing thoughts, and depression
- A disruption of your digestive system can lead to ulcers and intestinal problems
- A weakened immune system can lead to increased risk of infections, colds, flu and will slow down your body's ability to recover.

Controlling Type 2 Stress Responses



Our minds create Type 2 Stress responses to all the things that go on in our lives every day. When we have no time; not enough sleep; feel overwhelmed; angry, or depressed, we are deep into Type 2 stress. There's good news, though...

We can also use our mind and the mind/body connection to reduce our Type 2 stress. Practicing mind/body medicine and practices can alleviate most of your Type 2 stress, leaving you more able to focus, function, and plan ahead for optimal performance.

**“It was the class fight or flight response!
Next time, try flight!”**

What's in your tool box?

Ok...it's fine to know how your stress happens...but now what can you do about lowering your stress so you can stay focused on your goals...one of which, hopefully, is to stay healthy!

Over the next several pages, we will describe several very simple yet very powerful techniques (tools) you can use to help you lower your stress levels.

If you incorporate these tools into your life, you will be healthier, happier, and more productive than you can imagine...for the rest of your life.

Keep reading - this is very important stuff!!

What is Mind/Body Medicine?

All of your stress is created by your mind. It is the negative thoughts, the “trash talk” you make up in your mind, worrying about yesterday and tomorrow, thinking about a thousand things, wondering if you will win the race tomorrow...all of these thoughts bring you down. Type 2 stress results. The problem is that your mind can't hold onto all that stress so your mind puts the result of all those thoughts into your body. You begin to have some of the symptoms of undue stress. Look back and review that list of stress symptoms. How many do you have?



Massage Therapy

Massage therapy is one of the best tools to reduce the stress in your mind...and your body at the same time. Athletes are turning to sportsmassage more and more as they find out how much it helps. Relaxing during the massage, letting your mind just wander; not focusing on anything in particular are all signals to your mind and body that you are ok. There is no threat. You can relax. You feel more energetic and focused. Your body feels lighter and more flexible.

Remember stress can make your body hurt. Your muscles get tight, your circulation slows down, and you don't recover well because stress hurts your immune system. Sportsmassage can help with these physical symptoms as well. Find a good sportsmassage therapist and put him or her on your support team.

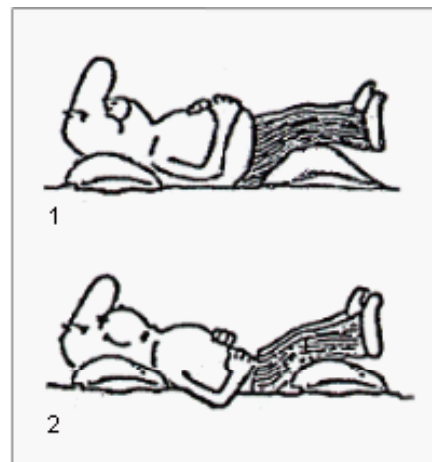
Massage is just one of the techniques you can use to help you manage and reduce the stress in your life. There are other very simple tools you can use to manage and reduce your stress. We are going to discuss those tools next.

BREATHE IN YOUR BELLY

Human beings are the only species on earth that can control the very act of breathing. On the one hand, breathing is automatic, in that we don't have to think about breathing and voluntary, in that we can choose to hold or change the way we breathe. This is the key to using your breath to reduce stress.

Here's how to breathe in your belly

- * put one hand on your upper chest, and the other on your belly just above your waist
- * breathe in slowly through your nose - you should be able to feel the hand on your belly moving out (the hand on your chest shouldn't move)
- * breathe out slowly through your pursed lips - you should be able to feel the hand on your belly moving in as you exhale (breathe out)



Calming Breath Exercise

The calming breath exercise was adapted from the ancient discipline of yoga. It is a very efficient technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation quickly.

Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five ("one...two...three...four...five" as you inhale).

Pause and hold your breath to a count of five.

Exhale slowly, through your nose or mouth, to a count of seven (or more if it takes you longer). Be sure to exhale fully.

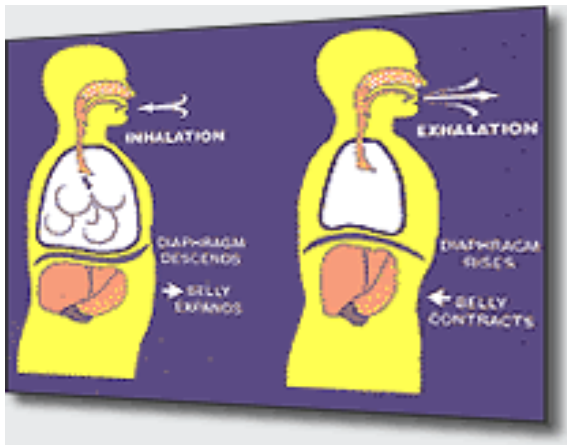
When you've exhaled completely, take two breaths in your normal rhythm, and then repeat steps 1 through 3 in the cycle above.

Keep up the exercise for at least three to five minutes. This should involve going through at least ten cycles of in-five, hold-five, and out-seven. As you continue the exercise, you may notice that you can count higher when you exhale than when you inhale. Allow these variations in your counting to occur if they do, and just continue with the exercise for up to five minutes. Remember to take two normal breaths between each cycle. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing this exercise, stop for thirty seconds and then start again.

Throughout the exercise, keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in breaths or breathing out suddenly.

Optional: Each time you exhale, you may wish to say "relax," "calm," "let go," or any other relaxing word or phrase silently to yourself. Allow your whole body to let go as you do this. If you keep this up each time you practice, eventually just saying your relaxing word by itself will bring on a mild state of relaxation.

Practice



Practice the abdominal breathing or calming breath exercise for five minutes every day for at least two weeks. If possible, find a regular time each day to do this so that your breathing exercise becomes a habit. With practice, you can learn in a short period of time to "damp down" the physiological reactions underlying anxiety and panic.

Once you feel you've gained some mastery in the use of either technique, apply it when you feel stressed, anxious, or when you experience the onset of panic symptoms. By extending your practice of either breathing exercise to a month or longer, you will begin to retrain yourself to breathe from your abdomen. The more you can shift the center of your breathing from your chest to your abdomen, the more consistently you will feel relaxed on an ongoing basis.

(Adapted from: The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne, Oakland, CA, 1995.)

The Art of Appreciation

When you are stressed, your life often seems sad or lonely. The world around you seems like a hostile place. Everything is negative.

The art of appreciation offers immediate help in changing this negative view. When you are rushed and stressed, you eat fast, don't notice the day around you, miss the sound of the birds, and other beautiful things in your world.



Appreciation is the simple act of noticing the good in your life. Learning to see the simple things in your life sounds easy. It isn't. When you are stressed you become overwhelmed with everything and you lose sight of how really lucky you are...to be alive, healthy, a good athlete, a member of a family and have a circle of friends. When you are stressed, you miss the routine things in your life like taking a warm shower, savoring your food, breathing in the warm air of a spring morning.

It is a proven fact that your mind and body can relax in four to six seconds when you bring your mind's eye to something good, or beautiful like a sunset or your best friend rounding the corner on his way to winning the race. When you see goodness or generate positive thoughts, the message your body experiences is "Relax!"

Practice

Before you begin your day:

1. Review the things you need to get done during the day
2. Include on your list two specific things to be thankful for.

During a stressful time:

1. Take two slow, deep belly-breaths.
2. When inhaling for your third breath, think deeply on one of the following: someone you love, a beautiful place, and acts of kindness done for you.

Tips

When you think of a place, think about a place that brings good memories or is particularly beautiful...perhaps a vacation spot.

When you think of a kind act, think clearly about what someone did that was loving.

Appreciating positive things is enhanced when combine with belly-breathing.

When to use...

1. When stress and difficulties pile up
2. When there's just too much to do
3. When you have to make a decision
4. Before making a difficult phone call
5. When you feel unappreciated
6. When talking with a family member or friend to remember how much that person means to you
7. When feeling lonely or isolated

Tighten To Relax

After your mind creates stress, it places that stress in your body somewhere. You begin to experience a tight neck or a sore back, you may get a cramp in your leg or your shoulders tighten and come forward. Your physical well-being becomes jeopardized. That's not all.

Prolonged physical stress becomes the new you. You begin to think all the tightness and tension and soreness are normal. ***Pain and discomfort are not normal.*** What's worse is you may be heading for major problems like high blood pressure, diabetes, headache, muscle strain and injuries. Ask yourself a question. "If I am already tight and sore and stressed, how in the world can I perform to my best ability? How can I perform at all?" Sometimes you can actually forget how to relax.

The good news is you can teach your body to relax, just the opposite of how your body feels when it is tight. One of the most interesting things about muscles is that they relax to their greatest extent right after they have been tensed. Think about that for a moment.



Try this experiment. Clench your fist for a few seconds. Now completely relax your hand. You will feel your hand go from feeling light to feeling heavy. Muscles are heavier when they are relaxed than when they are stressed. So...tensing and relaxing your muscles is a skill that is so simple that you can practice this stress buster anywhere. Once you practice this skill, the relaxation you get will almost be instantaneous. Wouldn't it be great if, when you are standing on the starting line or protecting the net or getting ready to defend your position feeling all tight and tense, that you could relax immediately just by tightening and relaxing your muscles a few times?? You can.

Practice by lying on the floor. Tense your feet and let go. Now tense your feet and lower leg. Let go. Tense your whole leg and relax. Do the same with your hand, then your forearm, then your whole arm. Tighten your shoulders and let go. How do you feel? Much more relaxed and aware of your body, I bet.

Practice

1. Take two slow, deep belly-breaths
2. On the third inhalation, tighten your right arm from your shoulder to your hand
3. Hold tightly for two or three seconds
4. As you exhale, relax fully and let your arm drop
5. Repeat the first four steps with your other arm, each leg, and then your entire body
6. As you practice, repeat a relaxing affirmation, such as, "I am feeling good." Or "I am relaxed and at peace."

Tips

When you tense your muscles, really tense them;
when you relax, really relax
When you inhale, fill up your belly with air
When you exhale, let your belly relax and stay soft

When to use

Before going to bed
To feel alert when you awaken in the morning
Before physical exercise
When your neck and/or shoulders are tight