

Stress Management Techniques



If you find yourself showing signs of excessive stress, you can enhance your coping skills through techniques like cognitive restructuring, relaxation, exercise, proper nutrition, and anger management training.

Cognitive Restructuring is essentially changing the way you think about situations. Also called reframing, cognitive restructuring is a tool that helps you to reduce negative, irrational, or critical self-talk and get to the truth about a situation. It is based on the theory that our attitudes are determined by what we tell ourselves, and therefore, that positive self-talk can create a positive mood and reduce our stress.

Here are some basic questions and an example to help you with cognitive restructuring.

1. What is the stressful situation?	I am really ticked off because Jordan skipped practice AGAIN. I want to call and tell him what a lazy kid he is! Better yet, I just want to kick him off the team!!
2. What negative or irrational thoughts did you have?	These kids don't appreciate me. I might as well quit coaching. I am wasting my time; I could spend this time with my own family. I am a failure as a coach – what kind of motivator am I if my star athlete doesn't even show up?
3. How did you really feel in the situation?	I feel angry, disrespected, frustrated, unappreciated, and taken for granted.
4. What are positive or rational thoughts about this situation?	Jordan's parents are getting divorced and he is having problems at home. This is affecting his performance. While Jordan is my best swimmer, many of the other swimmers are steadily improving and doing great. Their parents are supportive of me as a coach. I am often congratulated by my peers and colleagues.
5. What can you do about the situation?	I should talk to Jordan and his parents about his absences when I am calm. If he continues to miss practices I may have to ask him to leave the team, but not because I'm angry. In the meantime, I need to focus on the other swimmers.

Relaxation techniques help you manage stress and improve your concentration and health. Here are a few relaxation techniques to try:

- * **Muscle relaxation:** Beginning with your face, tense your muscles and hold for 5-10 seconds. Release. Repeat. Then move on to other muscles -- jaw, shoulders, arms, hands, abdomen, quads, thighs, legs, ankles – working down to your feet. Repeat until you've relaxed all muscles throughout your body.
- * **Correct your posture:** Straightening your spine aids circulation and helps reduce muscle tension.
- * **Visualization:** While in a comfortable position, imagine yourself in your favorite place or a calm location, like the beach. Imagine the specific details: How does it smell? Sound? Feel? What do you see?



- * **Meditation:** Get into a comfortable position. Close your eyes and focus on a calming thought, phrase, word, or object. It's normal if other thoughts pop into your mind as you are focusing. Acknowledge the "intrusion" briefly without feeling guilty, and then resume your concentration. It may help to listen to music or to meditate on a word or an affirming phrase like "I am calm. I will get through this."
- * **Breathing:** Get into a comfortable position. Slowly inhale through your nose. Exhale slowly through your mouth, completely emptying your lungs. Repeat until you feel calm and relaxed.
- * **Mindfulness:** Be aware of the present moment. You can do this by focusing on an object or feeling. For instance, while you swim, focus on the feeling of the water on your skin and how your hands, arms, back, and legs feel as you move through the water.
- * **Write:** Journaling, making lists, or just writing your thoughts as they come to your mind can help you release stress.
- * **Take a time out and count to ten:** Our parents told us to do it, but it really works! Take a moment away from the situation that is stressing you out and count to ten, slowly. Breathe deeply before each count so you can return to the situation more relaxed.

Exercise is perhaps the most common way that coaches reduce stress. Think about the reasons you got involved in coaching in the first place – your love of the sport and the way you felt– and make time to enjoy the sport yourself!

Experts encourage us to exercise at least five times a week. But even when you do not have time for a long work-out, getting your body moving in any way you can will help with your stress. So if you only have a few minutes to stretch, go for a walk, or stretch out your arms and shake your hands for a few seconds to loosen your neck and back.

Nutrition plays a vital role in stress reduction. Carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins and minerals are all important for energy, mental concentration, and emotional stability. Because stress compromises your immune system you need certain nutrients more during times of stress. A well-balanced diet will help you during times of stress. Many experts recommend taking a multivitamin but this is not a substitute for healthy eating.

Healthy eating also means reducing your consumption of sugar and caffeine. Sugar provides energy in the short term, but with time will leave you more hungry and with less energy. Caffeine is a stimulant and can cause poor sleep and even worsen the negative effects of stress on your body.

Anger management training uses cognitive restructuring and cognitive behavioral training to help individuals overcome rage and control angry impulses. The adrenaline you feel at big events is part of what makes coaching so rewarding, but anger often results from defeat and under intense stress, controlling that anger can be difficult. Anger management training can help you learn to control your response in difficult and disappointing circumstances. You can also learn healthy ways to express your anger instead of taking it out on your team, colleagues, family, and yourself.