

# 7 days of Psychology

## Sport Psychology

### What is sport psychology?

Sport and exercise psychology is a widely publicised but often misunderstood area of psychology. Psychologists who specialise in this area of sport and exercise aim to work collaboratively with their clients to meet their sporting, exercise and lifestyle goals, often by assisting clients in learning new mental skills.

Sport and Exercise Psychologists can assist in many different domains, including

- Performance
  - Educating and teaching skills to optimize performance
    - Restoring performance - managing performance slumps, overcoming setbacks, enhancing motivation
    - Enhancing performance - improving performance using mental skills
    - Mental toughness and resilience:
      - Managing emotions (e.g. anxiety, anger)
      - Attention and concentration
      - Effective preparation
      - Positive mindset
      - Team Culture
  - Assisting sporting clubs/teams/organisations in developing a positive group culture

- Team building, leadership, communication and norms
- Keeping sport in perspective – balance between being competitive and having fun
- Wellbeing
- Assisting clients to maintain or improve physical and mental health and wellbeing and potentially addressing mental health concerns
  - Adherence to exercise regimes and weight loss programs
  - Stress management and preventing burnout
  - Dealing with and returning from injury – the psychology of healing
  - Maintaining sport and life balance
  - Career transitions – into and out of sport

## Sport Psychology Myth Busters

**Myth #1: Sports Psychology is only for ‘problem’ athletes or those who are ‘mentally weak’**

**BUSTED:** Many people wrongly think that all sport psychologists work with athletes who have psychological or clinical problems, but many elite athletes who are already strong and performing well seek out the services of sport psychologists. Athletes often use sport psychology to **improve** their mental skills, not to ‘fix’ them from a broken-state.

**Myth #2: Sport Psychology is only for use with highly skilled athletes**

**BUSTED:** Sport psychology is not only for the elite. Any level, age, gender and sport can benefit from sport psychology techniques. Parents, coaches and officials also can benefit. It’s important though to implement the

appropriate type of mental skills for the athlete's individual capabilities.

### **Myth #3: Performance enhancement is only for athletes**

**BUSTED:** Principles within sport and exercise psychology can also be applied to other contexts in which performance is important – music, theatre or in the work place. Anyone who wishes to perform consistently under pressure, cope with stress and anxiety or increase confidence may benefit from using sport psychology skills and techniques.

### **Myth #4: Sports Psychology is a “quick-fix” when an athlete is experiencing performance issues.**

**BUSTED:** Many people mistakenly think that sport psychology offers a quick fix to psychological problems. While athletes may see some improvement after a single session with a sports psychologist, for more consistent and long-term benefits to accrue, extended and dedicated study and application of mental skills training are needed. Psychological skills take time and practice to develop, and will help athletes reach their potential and maximise their abilities.

### **Myth #5: Just reading about how to use mental skills training can enhance performance.**

**BUSTED:** Having a conceptual understanding of sport psychology techniques is important, but not sufficient to help an athlete consistently perform under pressure. Just as an elite athlete must practice their physical skills, the techniques of sports psychology need to be practised, implemented in actual game conditions, and mastered before they can be used reliably under competitive conditions.

# Quick Tips for Competition

## Leading up to the Event

Try using some of the following tips:

- Setting targets helps with motivation, focus & satisfaction
  - List 1 or 2 Target Goals you would like to aim for in this event. Think about where you need to focus your energy to achieve those targets (e.g. I am aiming for a personal best (PB), to do that I need to run at least three times a week and remember keep my stride long and shoulders relaxed when running).
  - Work out your competition routine well before the race, and stick to it – this will help manage nerves and get you focused.
  - Break the event down into important segments and have a clear focus for each segment – focus on one segment at a time. It is easier to focus for short bursts of time than for long periods all in one go.
  - Get a good night's sleep.
  - Noticing your thinking helps with confidence, focus and control.
  - Practice encouraging yourself like you would encourage a friend.

## On Competition Day

Try using some of the following tips:

- Remember nerves are a normal part of competition and may actually be helpful due to the extra adrenaline in our bodies, so do your best to use this extra energy to fuel your performance.
- Try clearing your mind by taking a deep breath and saying a “key word” to yourself. For example: Deep breath just think of “relax shoulders / long stride”.

- Use positive self-talk to help you push through (e.g. you can do it, keep pushing, you have trained for this).
- Stay present, notice your surroundings and be engaged with the experience, rather than focusing all your attention on the outcome
- Use your performance key words (e.g. smooth, light, streamline).
- ***Enjoy the occasion, share the spirit of the day, use it to fuel your performance!***

For more tips, head to the [AIS Performance Psychology](#) Webpage.

## Where to learn more

If you have any questions about how sport and exercise psychology can benefit you, feel free to use the information below to contact any of the sport psychologists around Adelaide through the College of Sport & Exercise Psychologists committee or the websites below;

- Matt McGregor – 0402 580 449 or [mattkmcgregor@hotmail.com](mailto:mattkmcgregor@hotmail.com)
- Chad Timmermans – 0416 113 013 or [chad@chadtimmermans.com.au](mailto:chad@chadtimmermans.com.au)
- John Baranoff – 0421 428 953 or [johnbaranoff@gmail.com](mailto:johnbaranoff@gmail.com)
- Cathy Martin – 0412 280 257 or [cathy@mcraig.com.au](mailto:cathy@mcraig.com.au)

## More about Sport and Exercise Psychology

- [psychology.org.au/community/specialist/sport](http://psychology.org.au/community/specialist/sport)
- [groups.psychology.org.au/csep](http://groups.psychology.org.au/csep)
- [believeinchange.com/Home/About-Us/Areas-of-Psychology/Sport-and-exercise-psychology](http://believeinchange.com/Home/About-Us/Areas-of-Psychology/Sport-and-exercise-psychology)
- APS Find a Psychologist  
Service: [psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist/Default.aspx?ID=5911](http://psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist/Default.aspx?ID=5911)

## Study sport psychology

If you would like to know about the pathway to becoming a sport psychologist please see:

[www.psychology.org.au/studentHQ/studying/study-pathways/](http://www.psychology.org.au/studentHQ/studying/study-pathways/)

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