



METRIFIT FACT SHEET: STRESS AND THE ATHLETE



Life is full of stress. Whether we are working or studying, we all experience anxiety of some sort and it can be even more challenging for an athlete who may have to deal with the pressures of study or work as well as the heavy burden of preparation and expectation.

Stress is one of those factors that can have a huge impact on an athlete's performance, in terms of getting the best out of training, avoiding injuries and being in the best position to deal with competition.

As a result it is vital that an athlete or coach is able to identify symptoms at an early stage and crucially, be able to find techniques to allow them deal with the issues.

THE DANGERS OF STRESS

The dangers of stress are outlined by [Dr Mercola](#) who reveals just how damaging it can be by stating that stress:

- Impairs Working Memory
- Compromises Visual Acuity
- Raises Your Risk for Injury
- Depletes Emotional Resources
- Sabotages Concentration
- Hampers your fitness gains
- Seriously Impedes Weight Loss
- Impairs Motor Coordination
- Slows Exercise Recovery
- Kills Motivation

Research proves that long term stress can not only increase cortisol levels in that moment, but more importantly it disrupts our natural cortisol rhythm. Cortisol affects everything in our bodies: insulin spikes, insulin sensitivity, hunger/cravings, mood/concentration, gut function/ digestion, immune system/ability to recover, fertility and libido..

THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

As a result of such negative consequences, it is important to be able to recognize the [symptoms of stress](#), and this can be done by asking yourself the following questions:

- Are you wired and tired?
- Do you have trouble getting to sleep and staying asleep?
- Do you wake up unrefreshed after a sleep?
- Do you carry extra weight around your middle?
- Do you suffer from frequent urination in the middle of the night?
- Do you feel tired for no reason?
- Do you feel run down / over whelmed?
- Do you crave sugar or salty snacks?
- Do you feel more awake or alert in the evening?
- Are you overtraining and not sleeping?



If the answer is yes to any of the above questions, then cortisol may be to blame and it's time to start addressing this situation before it adversely affects your performance.

There are many suggestions as to how you should tackle the issue of stress and some helpful reminders include:

- Proper nutrition
- Increase downtime: spend more time in nature, with loved ones, away from laptop / phone.
- Mind relaxation techniques
- Use an app or program for monitoring your training and illness
- Massage
- Deep breathing exercise: yoga meditation, mindfulness.
- Establish a consistent circadian rhythm (sleep and wake at same time).
- Thought redirection

One of the main areas where stress can manifest itself coming up to competition is its adverse effect on sleep. As a result athletes need to find techniques to allow them to get proper sleep.

Techniques include:

Mind relaxation techniques where the athlete actively relaxes their body and mind and concentrates on tranquil thoughts to help sleep.

Massage is something that can help reduce anxiety and works well on an ongoing basis as well as before competition.

Thought redirection helps reduce anxiety by taking your focus off the issue by thinking of something else.

COMPETITION STRESS AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Another area where stress can manifest itself is during competition itself and this can have a particularly damaging effect on the athlete's performance. There are so many accounts of athletes and coaches left completely frustrated at a performance that went badly wrong, with little or no explanation for what went wrong. There are times when training seems to have gone according to plan and despite the athlete being injury-free and in peak physical condition, that preparation is not reflected in performance. In a lot of these cases, the reason the athlete was unable to produce the performance was simply down to stress and anxiety. Another situation where stress can have an adverse effect on an athlete is when they appear to have victory within their grasp. Again, there are numerous examples of athletes who look to have produced the goods on the big stage by putting themselves in a winning position. However, it is at that point that the anxiety seems to strike and they appear to crack under the pressure. It is normal for an athlete to experience higher levels of stress coming up to competition and during the event itself, but once again it is how you deal with this anxiety that can be critical to your chances of success.

In [How to Overcome Sports Kristi Pikiawicz](#) provides the following advice on how to reduce performance anxiety before the event

- **Recognize** that pre-race jitters are normal.
- **Prepare** both mentally and physically.
- **Visualize** Allow a few minutes to practice visualization.
- **Focus** on the task at hand rather than the outcome.
- Force a **smile** – it helps if you are struggling with negative thoughts.
- Race like you don't care about the outcome.



Using an athlete monitoring solution like [Metrifit](#) helps you monitor your eating and sleeping patterns, as well as other factors which can have a direct affect on stress. Regular patterns will help keep your stress level in check and monitoring on a regular basis helps you recognise deviations from your normal routine and identify trigger points that increase your stress levels.

REFERENCES

[Stress and Anxiety in Athletes](#) | United States Sports Academy
[How stress can affect sports performance](#) | Peak Performance Sports
[How to overcome sports performance anxiety](#) | Kristi Pikiawicz
[10 ways stress can mess with your workouts](#) | Dr Mercola
[Techniques for controlling competition anxiety](#) | Dresden Archibald
[Stress Management for Athletes](#)

[Stress and Life Load](#)
[Learning to deal with anxiety essential for an athlete](#)
[The importance of mental well-being](#)
[Effects of stress on academic and athletic performance](#)
[Can sleep improve your athletic performance](#)
[Asking the right questions to access athlete wellbeing](#)