

BREATHING THROUGH A PERFORMANCE BLOCK

“Breathe! “What? Of course I breathe.” Notice that when you breathe you are tense, uptight, fearful, or nervous, you begin to hold you breathe. This is a natural response when someone is not relaxed. As the tensions of the day increase, people tend to breathe more shallowly. One of the cornerstones of a state of relaxation is good, deep breathing. I often tease the athletes I work with by spontaneously asking, “Are you breathing?” And it is true-many times they are not breathing regularly. It will help you begin noticing in any tense situation, either athletic or in your personal or work life, whether or not you are holding your breath or breathing shallowly. If you are, make an effort to breathe deeply and fully to create a more relaxed state of mind and physical well-being.

If you panic or freeze, you should concentrate on breathing deeply and do a short centering and focusing sequence while sitting, standing, or lying down. Close your eyes for a moment, bring your attention inward and again call for the feelings of confidence and control from previous practice or events. Physical movement may help get rid of excess energy as well. Physical movement changes mental states, so activities such as stretching, jogging briefly or in place, or simply walking while being aware of your breathing should help you control feelings of panic. Paying attention to your breathing is most important. Concentrate on maintaining relaxed, full breaths.

Wallowing in your fear accomplishes nothing. You must acknowledge and control your fear, then take positive actions to begin thinking differently. Affirmations may help return you to a more controlled and peaceful state of mind. You may also want to explore visualizations, such as the following, to help you bring feelings of confidence and competence to any competitive situation.