

## ***Change to Chill for Athletes***

**We get it. Most athletes aren't really into the whole "mindfulness" thing.**

**But guess what:** there's a ton of research behind the benefits of practicing mindfulness and its link to increased athletic performance, readiness for competition and overall success.

- In a study of over 200 Olympic athletes that assessed for three readiness factors (mental, physical and technical), **only mental readiness was significantly associated with how successful the athletes were in the Olympics.**
- A recent study published in the Journal of Health Psychology found that athletes who practice mindful meditation techniques **are far more motivated to exercise and feel more satisfied by their workouts.**
- A study of university student athletes found that athletes who practiced a routine mindfulness program rated their own **performance as higher and reported less sports-related anxiety.**
- In a 2017 study of Division I university athletes, researchers found that, when used together, mindfulness and relaxation practices **serve as a protective factors against the emotional and cognitive impacts of high-demand, high-stress times** that athletes face regularly.

As an added bonus, practicing mindfulness also helps teens to:

- **reduce their overall stress**
- **get better sleep**
- **improve mental clarity and concentration**

**Have we got your attention? Let's get started.**

### **Mindfulness Reflection Activity**

Gather the team together and in large or small groups have athletes answer one, some or all of the questions below. Once they have answered the question(s) engage in a brief discussion around their answers.

- What are three reasons you like being part of a team sport?
- What is the best part about competing?
- What emotions do you feel when you play well?
- How would you describe what feeling confident is like?
- How does being an athlete make you a better person?
- What is the one thing you do after a good performance?



- What do you do to calm your butterflies while you compete?
- What do you do to help you get focused before a game or meet?
- Do you use visual cues of your environment to help you focus? What are they?
- What do you give up to play sports?
- What do you do to stay calm under pressure?
- Do you have a mantra? What is it?
- Do you think attitude is a factor in winning? Why?
- How does being an athlete inspire you to do good?
- How does being an athlete make you a better student?

**Mental Training Practices for Athletes**

Have athletes tackle each of these training practices – either all at one time or periodically throughout the season. Check in with the team regularly to get a pulse on how they are doing with their practices.

**1. Write down your goals**

Do you have a goal for your mental health? A goal for your mindfulness practice? For your athletic performance?

Go “old school” and write down your mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, academic and athletic goals! Putting pen to paper helps get these thoughts out of your head and, research shows, that you’re more likely to follow through with these goals when you’ve written them down.

**2. Practice positive self-talk**

As a team, or as an individual, commit to using instructional or positive self-talk rather than critical talk.

<b>Examples of Critical Talk</b>	<b>Examples of Instructional/Positive Talk</b>
<i>I can't make that shot.</i>	<i>I've been training. I can make the shot.</i>
<i>I won't be able to run that fast.</i>	<i>I am strong and fast.</i>
<i>I'm not motivated.</i>	<i>What song would really pump me up right now?</i>
<i>I'm not good enough to make the team.</i>	<i>I am enough and I am talented.</i>
<i>I'll just let everyone down.</i>	<i>I am more than this goal. I will do the best I can.</i>

Paying attention to your internal dialogue, as well as the stories you tell yourself, your friends and your family, is important because your internal dialogue can reflect and shape your mental state. It's OK to notice the thoughts or feelings when they come up, but it's not OK to take them with you to the next race or shot.

### 3. Mentally practice like you physically practice

As an athlete, you spend countless hours training your physical body to perform. Now that you know the importance of your mental state, reflect on how much time you spend training your brain.

Start small with mini check-ins throughout the day. When you think of it, ask your mind where is your body? How is your body feeling? How is your mind feeling? Are there emotions present?

#### **Guided Imagery for Athletes**

Whether your team is prepping for a big game or bouncing back from a tough loss, use this guided imagery exercise to get in the state of mind you need.

Invite everyone to get into a comfortable position. Make sure you've determined the desired outcome before beginning – this could be to focus, the win, to reset, to be resilient, etc.

1. Settle into the space. Feel the weight of your body supported by the ground/chair/floor. Take a few deep breathes – in through the nose and out through the mouth. Gently close your eyes.
2. Notice the sensations of the space. Is there a smell you notice? What are the sounds around you? What is the temperature of the air? Just take in the sensations – you don't have to react or response, just notice.
3. Gently shift your attention to your breathing. Relax into your normal pattern of breath. Feel your belly and chest rise and fall with each breath.
4. Invite the group to visualize the outcome you pre-determined. This visualization should be detailed and as realistic as possible.  
Use all five senses when visualize the outcome. What would you feel? What would you see? What would you hear? Who would be there? What would it smell like? What would it taste like? What would the temperature be? What textures would you feel?  
Be as detailed as you can.
5. Once you have settled into the visualization, refocus your attention on your breath.
6. Revisit the sensations of the space you are in – what are the sounds, smells, temperature, etc.?
7. Feel the weight of your body in space and the ground supporting your body.
8. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

Revisit this exercise and the visualized place as often as possible before or after a practice or game.

***For more information, activities and videos on guided imagery, check out the [Guided Imagery content on Change to Chill!](#)***

**Mindful Movement for Athletes**

Mindful movement means slowing down. Being present in what we are doing at any one time. By practicing mindful movement we can slow down to hear or discover what we are thinking and feeling.

As a team, commit to starting or ending practice or workouts with these mindful movements:

- Seated pigeon - improves mobility.



- Cobra – releases pressure in the spine.



- Dolphin - stretches the upper back and shoulders, hamstrings, calves and foot arches at the same time.



- Frog - improves strength of connective tissue around the ankles and knees, which makes it a great warm-up movement prior to lower-body exercises.



- Supported Backbends - they very lightly stretch tight spots, while giving athletes a chance for deep relaxation, which speeds up recovery.
  - Fish



- Bridge



- Reclined Big Toe - strengthens the knees and can target the IT band (a common tight spot in runners) and can relieve backaches and sciatic pain. Using a band/strap makes it accessible for everyone.



- Boat Pose – increases abdominal and hip flexor strength.



- Bow Pose – stretches the front of the body, improves posture and strengthens the back muscles.

