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Performance Anxiety in Athletes

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Signs and Symptoms:

- "Butterfly feeling" in the stomach or nervousness
- Sweating
- Negative imagining and visualization
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased respiratory rate
- Vomiting or defecation

Causes:

- Injury and Rehabilitation/Return to play
- Competition
- Pressure situations
- Lack of social support (Yang et al., 2014)
- Self-doubt (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2014)
 - Many athletes develop an increased sense of self-doubt and worry about their ability and career during rehabilitation after sustaining an injury.
- Frustration (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2014)
 - Causes include boredom with rehabilitation exercises and not being able to do what they were used to doing or wanted to do.

Clinical Examples:

Example 1: This athlete is affected by anxiety cognitively. The individual is plagued mental thoughts, worry, fears, letting teammates down, and the possibility of injury. The anxiety is innate and arises psychologically. The disposition the athlete is in, including chronic pain and injury ridden, can increase anxiety. The fact of being put into a new position on the team can create uncertainty and cause a lack of self-confidence.

Example 2: This athlete is affected by anxiety through the cognitive process with mental thoughts, uncertainty, worry of previous injury and potential re-injury, and fears. The state anxiety stems from the rehabilitation the athlete is progressing through. The trait anxiety that has psychologically been obtained causes the athlete to worry about further re-injury, creates fear of trusting in oneself that re-injury will not occur, and has caused a lack of self-confidence. The anxiety that has developed has become more debilitating.

Cognitive Vs. Somatic

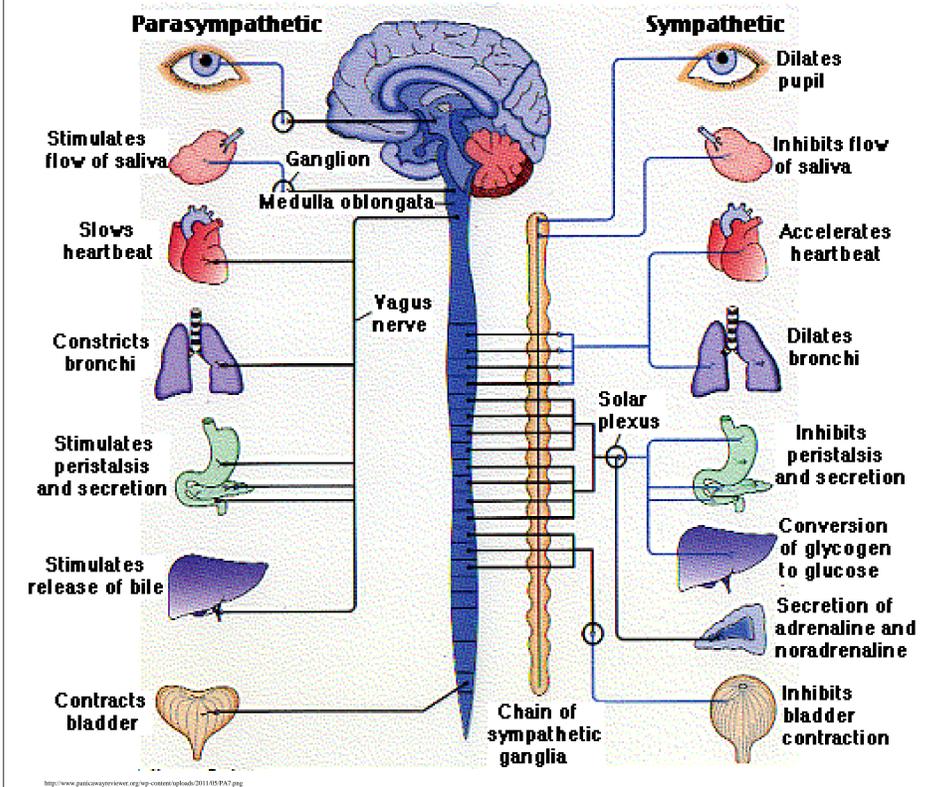
- Cognitive: The mental concerns, or thoughts, and worries one perceives that build off of the fear response.
- Cognitive anxiety is disruptive in athletics because mental resources are being used inefficiently.
- Somatic: Provoked by bodily symptoms of tension such as the "butterfly feeling" in the stomach.
- Somatic arousal is necessary in athletics because it enhances reaction speed of decision making as well as physical reactions.
- When somatic anxiety is high, then there is a negative linear relationship between cognitive anxiety and performance.
- When somatic anxiety is low, then there is a positive linear relationship between cognitive anxiety and performance. (Fazey & Hardy, 1988)

State Vs. Trait

- State: The moment by moment reaction to a certain situation or circumstance.
 - External sources of anxiety (spectators, crowd, time, competitive level, setting, and consequences).
- Trait: The athlete's psychological reaction to the situation; they're disposition.
 - Internal sources of anxiety (investment, uncertainty, self-confidence, and letting self or others down).

Ego Affecting Anxiety

- Self-confidence: As self confidence in abilities or teammates abilities, anxiety was found to be more facilitative than debilitating on performance (Gillham, 2014).
- Self-confidence can decrease the intensity level by which the anxiety symptoms are perceived. (Lundqvist, 2010)
- Self-sufficiency: The ability of an individual to perform "normal" tasks on their own.
- Ego-oriented: Is based on the level of individual performance. The individual reacts personally, sees situation or state as threatening to self-esteem. They learn from the situation and retain knowledge even if the moment is at extreme intensity and is disruptive.
- Task-oriented: The individual reacts impersonally, and is not concerned about their own level of performance. Athletes believe that success stems from working hard, exerting high levels of effort, and improving skills (Duda & Hall, 2001 ; Roberts, 2001).



Accommodating For Anxiety

- Practicing: Training with mild levels of anxiety helps to decrease the intensity levels of anxiety when performing in extreme intensity situations.
- It is concluded that practicing perceptual-motor tasks under mild levels of anxiety can also prevent choking when performing with higher levels of anxiety.
- Visualization: The process of thinking of, imagining, seeing a positive performance in the upcoming competition. Positively seeing yourself achieving goals, surpassing the expected outcomes and being ready to deal with stressors or debilitating circumstances.
- Relaxation: The purpose of relaxation training is to enable athletes to feel relaxed in both mind and body. A relaxed feeling can help an individual focus effectively on performance aspects. One form of relaxation practice relates beyond the typical training session and competition stage to. This can include listening to music to help focus or performing other relaxation techniques such as Yoga. The other form of relaxation practice can be within the changing environment prior to a competition. This can include positive intent statements or verbal cues, breathing techniques, positive imagery or listening to music to help focus.
- Breathing: Deep breathing should be practiced and focus on different parts of the body before competitions that can provoke varying anxiety levels. Breathing techniques include inhaling through the nostrils and exhaling through the mouth. Through deep breathing, athletes can become in tune with their body and feel where they have higher levels of tension.
- Positive Self Talk: Supports the cognition within the individuals own mind. A positive mind will be more balanced, which in turn will provide a better chance for achieving success. The brain must be channeled to direct thinking to support performance.
- Goal Setting: Goal setting allows individuals to attain purposeful direction and focus on tasks at hand. It must be a mechanism through which individuals develop a process in order to achieve set targets.

Involved Anatomy

