



**Mindfulness Meditation for Athletes**

EDUCATION & SPORTS



**ERTHEO**

Est. 2001

**Get in  
the Zone**

## INTRODUCTION



Have you heard of flow? If not, you've probably heard of the zone. Being in the zone and experiencing flow are two similar ways to describe optimal experiences while completing a task. It's just that being "in the zone" is used more colloquially, and flow is the official term used in sport psychology. It turns out that athletes perform better when experiencing flow and that there's a certain formula for achieving flow and thus, performing better. This is really good news for high-performance coaches and athletes.

Since 1992, numerous studies have been conducted about flow and its relationship to optimal experience and performance in sport. Researchers have even discovered ways to induce flow or train athletes to experience

flow more easily by introducing mindfulness meditation exercises into their training routines.

At **Ertheo**, we investigated this new field of sports psychology to learn more about new findings in mindfulness meditation research and its relationship to flow, sports anxiety, and enhanced sports performance. Then, we reached out to mindfulness meditation experts all around the world to help us create a list of mindfulness meditation exercises to help reduce [sports anxiety](#) and improves sports performance.

# **CONTENTS**

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## **PART 1: INTRODUCING FLOW**

- What is the zone?
- Why do we call it flow?

## **PART 2: HOW ATHLETES GET INTO FLOW**

- How do we get into flow?
- What are the 9 dimensions of flow? How do they relate to sport?
- How can flow improve our sports performance?
- What keeps us from experiencing flow?

## **PART 3: MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**

- How can mindfulness meditation reduce sports anxiety and increase our likelihood to experience flow?
- What is mindfulness meditation?
- Mindfulness Meditation Guidelines

## **PART 4: MINDFULNESS MEDITATION EXERCISES FOR ATHLETES**

- Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercise with Power Pose
- Mindful Body Scan
- Full-Body Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Soccer Visualization
- Mindful Walking Meditation

## PART 1: INTRODUCING FLOW

### What is the zone?

The zone is a figurative mental space where extreme focus and attention give us a sort of tunnel-vision that enhances our performance or productivity and changes our perception of time. When we're [in the zone](#), we're so focused on whatever we're doing that we're almost in our own worlds, removed from the real world around us.

Athletes often describe being "in the zone" during their best performances. Connor McGregor, former UFC champion, describes his experience in the ring: "When I'm in there, I'm just in my zone. What people think about what they look at me, that's their business." Mark Calcavecchia, 13 time PGA tour winner,

described his experience on the golf course: "When I'm in the zone, I don't think about the shot, or the wind, or the distance, or the gallery, or anything. I just pull a club and swing."

The zone is a joyful place. When we're in the zone, we're usually too focused to feel joyful. We might not consciously feel joy at work or while completing an important project. But afterward, we

Many of us experience the zone in different ways during different activities. Some of us get in the zone while creating, so completely focused on our art that we forget to eat dinner. Others get in the zone while studying in the library or writing a paper. All of a sudden, we look outside the library window and it's dark because time flew by. Often times, we get in the zone at work. Those tend to be our most productive days.

usually think about our performance and accomplishment with contentment. At the same time, we're often exhausted and probably wouldn't choose to complete an intense soccer training program with no end goal. That being said, recent research on the zone has found that after spending some time in the zone experiencing flow, we feel like our life has meaning and purpose.



## Why do we call it flow?

Shortly after witnessing the destruction of WWII in Europe, American-Hungarian psychologist Mihály Csikzentmihályi became highly interested in what makes people happy in their everyday lives and what gives their lives meaning. He conducted numerous interviews with creative people in pursuit of an answer and found that most people experience happiness when they are so involved in their work, that they lose touch with reality. In other words, people are happiest when they're in the zone.

However, while athletes often use "the zone" to describe optimal experiences within the sport, Csikzentmihályi found that creative people (artists, musicians, writers, and athletes alike) describe their optimal experience as a kind of flowing. In 1972, Csikzentmihályi published a book called [Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience](#) where he talked about the state of being in the zone. He called it flow, and described all of the many benefits that flow can have on human experience.

Csikzentmihályi described flow as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved and you're using your skill to the utmost." [1]

So, not only are people happiest when

they're in the zone or in flow, but they're also most productive. Sounds good, right? Wouldn't it be great if there was a special formula to help athletes experience flow? Good news, there is.

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*Not only are people happiest when they're in flow, but they're also most productive.*

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## PART 2: HOW ATHLETES GET INTO FLOW

### How do we get into flow?

Some people experience flow more easily than others. Csikzentmihályi says that people with autotelic personalities are more likely to experience flow. "Autotelism is the belief that satisfying work is a justification in and of itself. The autotelic personality traits include curiosity, persistence, low self-centeredness, and a desire of performing activities for intrinsic reasons only." [1]

Likewise, researchers have tested the relationship between personality traits and flow experience in amateur vocalist students. They found that flow state is easier to experience for extraverted students. They also found that for more neurotic students, flow was more difficult to experience. [2] Fortunately, flow isn't entirely dependent on personality traits. Many external factors contribute to the likelihood of experiencing flow in any given activity.

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*Many external factors contribute to the likelihood of experiencing flow.*

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### What are the 9 dimensions of flow? How do they relate to sport?

Csikzentmihályi put together a sort of formula for achieving flow. He outlined nine elements of flow that both enable and describe flow experience. They are:

1. Challenge-skill balance
2. Action-awareness merging
3. Clear goals
4. Unambiguous feedback
5. Total concentration on the task at hand
6. Sense of control
7. Loss of self-consciousness
8. Transformation of time
9. Autotelic experience



When an individual experiences all nine elements at the same time, they are experiencing an optimal flow experience. However, individuals can experience some elements independently of others. In which case, they'd be experiencing a partial flow state.

It turns out that athletes can experience all nine dimensions of flow when practicing their sport, and when they do, they rate their performance better. [3] We'll talk about how flow can improve sports performance in the next section. For now, let's explore the nine dimensions of flow according to Csikzentmihályi and how they relate to sport:

### 1. Challenge-skill balance

Flow state requires a balance between our perception of challenge level and skill level. This means we should feel confident that we have the skills to complete the task while at the same time recognizing that completing the task would require our full concentration and attention on the challenge at hand and on the present moment.

*In sports, as athletes improve their skills, the challenge level increases. They either move up a level and compete against better components or give themselves new challenges to overcome. Sports provide athletes with the opportunity to continue challenging themselves and continue improving which is also what makes them enjoyable.*

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***When athletes experience flow, they perform better.***

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### 2. Action-awareness merging

Flow state often produces a feeling of unity between action and awareness. That is, during flow, we might describe feeling at one with whatever task we're doing. Our mind is completely present in the activity, undistracted by other life events or challenges that might cause us pain or anxiety in our daily lives. During flow, all consciousness of the world outside of the activity simply fades away, and we feel at one with the task.

*In many aspects of sports, athletes act almost automatically, using their **muscle memory** to perform well-learned skills. That way, they can focus on the more complex aspects of their sport. For example, advanced tennis players might not need to consciously think about how to hit the ball. They might, however, think about where to hit the ball to put them in an advantageous position to win the point. To advanced athletes, simpler aspects of their sport come naturally. Tennis players feel at one with their rackets, so to speak. This frees up their ability to think more complexly and strategically and experience flow.*

### 3. Clear goals

Flow state also requires clear goals. To enter flow, we must be able to describe exactly what we're supposed to do before attempting to complete the task. That way, during the activity, we can focus all of their attention on achieving the goal.

*Clear goals are woven into the rules and framework of sports. Athletes must score, earn a certain amount of points, be the fastest, etc. Even outside of the context of winning, clear goals are a key element in sports. In soccer, the end goal might be to score more goals than the opposing team. During the match, players know to maintain possession, make clean passes, win the ball back on defense, etc. All of which are clear goals that soccer players understand before the match which, therefore, facilitate flow.*

### 4. Unambiguous feedback

Unambiguous feedback about how we're performing is another key element of flow. To experience flow, we must receive positive feedback about our performance. Feedback can be received a number of ways. Sometimes the feedback comes from an outside source. Sometimes it comes simply from meeting our clear goals.

*For athletes, feedback comes from a range of factors, often at the same time. Athletes receive feedback from their own **kinesthetic awareness** of how their bodies are moving through space. When a diver perfects a dive or a gymnast perfects a flip, they don't need the judges' scores to feel that they've done a good job. However, most of the time, athletes do receive additional feedback from judges, fans, coaches, or simply meeting their goals. The feedback athletes receive as they perform facilitates flow.*

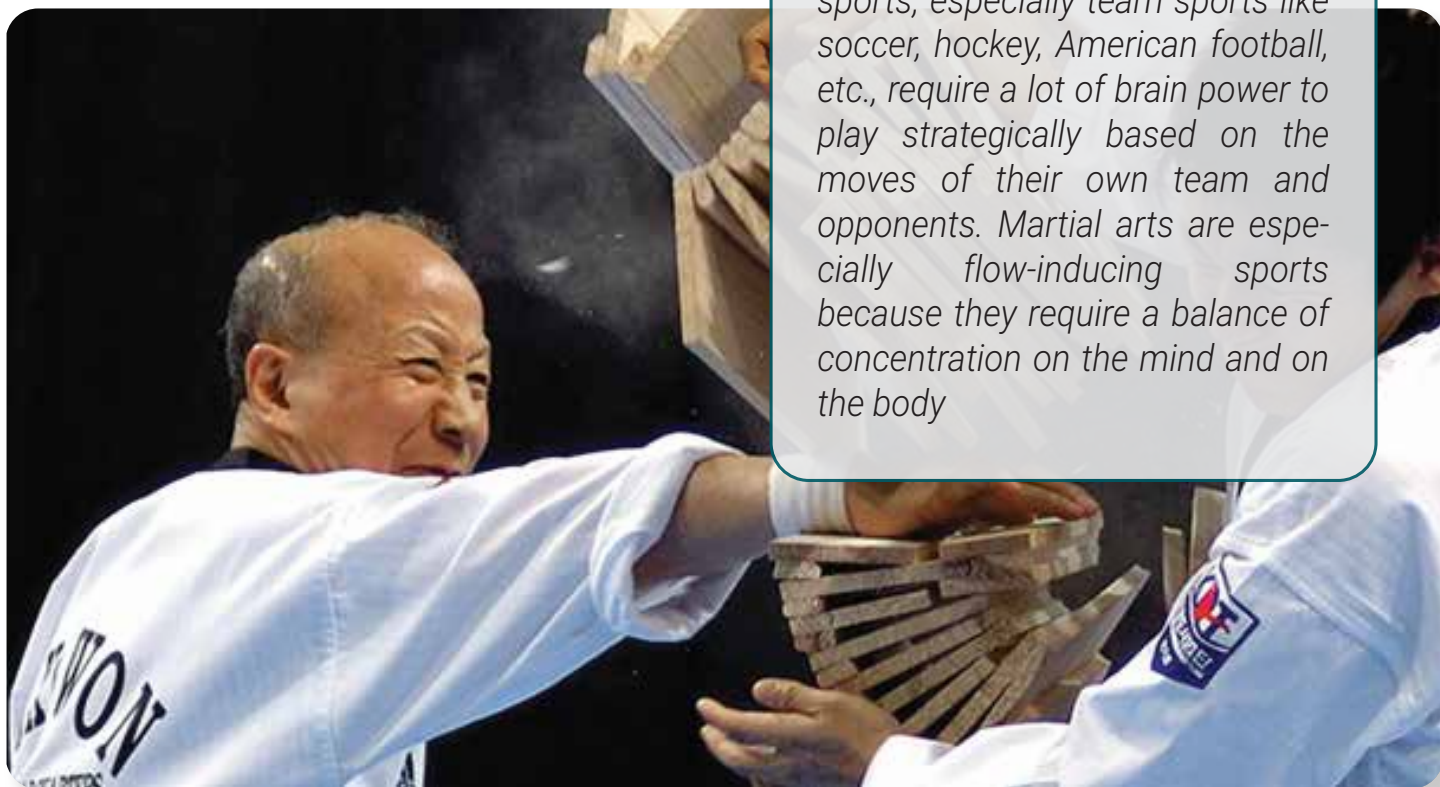




## 5. Total concentration on the task at hand

Total concentration on the task is one of the clearest indications of experiencing flow and is highly related to a challenge-skill balance. When our skill level is just high enough to accomplish the task, in order to really accomplish it, we need complete focus. In doing so, we forget about all the anxiety and troubles of daily life and enjoy the present moment. If we are able to complete the task while thinking about what we're cooking for dinner that night, our thoughts are likely to wander from the present moment and take us out of flow.

*This fifth element is one of the most important for experiencing flow. Most sports have the potential to provide enough challenge to require an **athlete's complete concentration**, especially at an advanced level. While some sports require complete physical control and concentration, other sports require more brain power to play strategically. In general, most individual sports without a face to face component, like gymnastics, for example, require more physical control and concentration. Other sports, especially team sports like soccer, hockey, American football, etc., require a lot of brain power to play strategically based on the moves of their own team and opponents. Martial arts are especially flow-inducing sports because they require a balance of concentration on the mind and on the body*



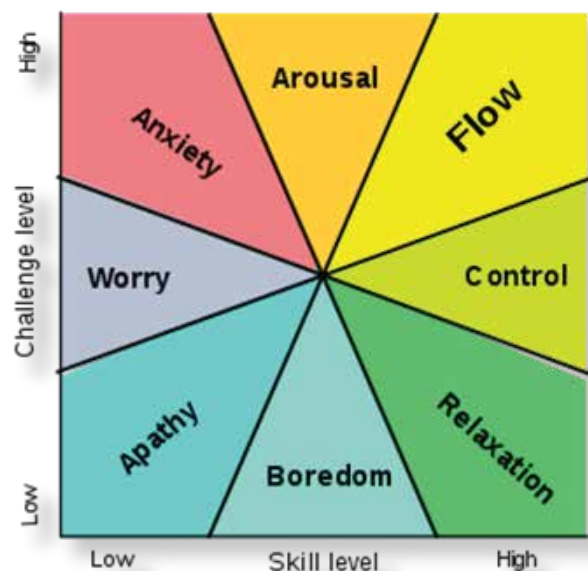
## 6. Sense of control

The sixth element of flow is a sense of control, which is closely related to a challenge-skill balance. Notice, the key to experiencing the sixth dimension of flow is a sense of control, not complete control. Complete control would imply that we easily have the skills to complete the task. A sense of

control, however, implies that while we have just enough skills to complete the task, if we focus all our attention on what we're doing in the present moment. On the other hand, if our skills reside far below the challenge level, we might feel out of control and start to doubt our abilities. This doubt would take us out of the present moment and out of flow.

The image to the right is a visual demonstration of the state of flow in comparison with other states we experience. As you can see, we feel complete control when the challenge level is moderate but our skills are advanced. Flow is located just above control where our skills are advanced, but the challenge level is also advanced, requiring our complete attention.

*Sports provide the perfect environment to experience a sense of control without complete control. As soon as athletes start to lean toward experiencing complete control, they tend to push themselves to accept new challenges to advance in the sport. As a diver perfects 1.5 somersaults in the tuck position, they might try for a slightly more difficult dive. When a soccer team starts to win almost all of their games, they move up to a higher division. When a climber starts to feel comfortable on a certain type of cliff, they might look for a slightly steeper or higher cliff. When athletes push themselves to accept new challenges without pushing themselves too far, they maintain a sense of control. This balance establishes flow.*



## 7. Loss of self-consciousness

Loss of **self-consciousness** is another important element of flow. Most of us live our lives consistently evaluating and judging ourselves and worrying about judgment from others. When we're self-conscious, we're unfocused, distracted by thought, and out of touch with the present moment. That's why the loss of self-consciousness is an important aspect of flow – because self-consciousness distracts us from the task at hand. That's also why the balance of skill and challenge level and complete concentration on the task at hand are so important for flow. When we need full concentration to complete a task, we can't let self-conscious thoughts distract us, or we'll fail.

*Some athletes are more likely to experience a loss of self-consciousness during their performances than others. Many athletes find it difficult to perform during competitions or in front of crowds because they're worried about judgment from spectators or coaches. This is called performance anxiety. Performance anxiety is a major problem for many athletes because this self-consciousness is often very difficult to control. It's hard to break the habit of self-judging, but athletes must break this habit and let go of self-consciousness to experience flow and perform optimally.*



## 8. Transformation of time

The transformation of time refers to our perception of time. Deeper flow experiences have the power to make us experience time as passing faster or slower than it is in reality. When we're focused so intensely on a task in the present moment, time seems to fade away or have little importance.

*This dimension of flow can be quite difficult for athletes to experience because for many sports, wins or losses are determined based on a specific period of time. As a result, players are very conscious of winning time or wasting time. Other sports, like tennis, are played until a certain outcome is reached. The importance of time in a sport can influence an athlete's ability to experience the transformation of time. Otherwise, whether or not an athlete experiences this dimension of flow highly depends of their personality.*

## 9. Autotelic experience

An autotelic experience is one that is intrinsically rewarding. This means we do the activity because the activity in itself makes us feel good, not because we receive external rewards like money, status, approval, etc., although such outcomes may result. Csikszentmihalyi said that in many cases, flow experiences bring us so much joy that we seek them out and they become autotelic. It's not until after the flow experience, however, that we experience this joy because during flow, we're often too focused on the task to fully experience joy.

*Most sports were invented for the sake of enjoyment. When we first began kicking balls around and shooting balls in baskets, we didn't do it for fame or fortune. We probably started doing it because we were bored and thinking of ways to enjoy our newfound free time. After all, many of the world's most popular sports today were invented in the late 1800s, right after the industrial revolution. With new machines doing all our field work, we had more time to sit around and think of new ways to have fun. Unfortunately, pressure to perform and win keeps many athletes from enjoying their sport. Others enjoy the pressure and competition and such pressure adds to the enjoyment of the sport. All in all, it's much easier to experience flow when we play a sport because we love it.*

## How can flow improve our sports performance?

Since Csikzentmihályi began researching flow in the 70s, researchers have been interested in the relationship between flow and peak sports performance where flow is an internal state, and peak performance refers to performing optimally.

In 1992, researchers found that athletes who were performing optimally reported experiencing total commitment, clearly defined goals, feedback about how well they were performing, concentration on performing the activity, task-relevant thoughts, sense of control, and feelings of fun, confidence, and enjoyment. Basically, athletes who were performing optimally were experiencing all nine dimensions of flow. [4]

Later, researchers found that “athletes in flow and relaxation states revealed the most optimal states, whereas athletes in apathy states showed the least optimal state. [In addition, they found] positive associations between athletes’ flow experience and their performance measures, indicating that positive emotional states are related to elevated levels of performance.” [5]

All in all, research indicates that flow is an optimal internal state that likely results in improved sports performance. That means if we want to perform at our best potential, we should try to experience flow whenever possible. As mentioned earlier, however, experi-

encing flow is easier for some people than for others. Let’s talk about common limitations of flow experience and how to overcome them.

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## What keeps us from experiencing flow?

Researchers have found that some main limitations of flow for athletes are sports anxiety and general pessimistic thinking. [6]

Athletes who suffer from sports anxiety constantly worry about their performance in general, their ability to perform during competitions, and/or injury or illness that could set them back during or before competitions. Read more about [common mental game challenges](#) at [sportspsychologytoday.com](#).

Let's think back to the seventh dimension of flow, "lack of self-consciousness." Sports anxiety is directly related to enhanced self-consciousness and, therefore, completely disrupts flow.

Furthermore, anxiety experienced by elite athletes over illness symptoms is linked to the risk of being injured during competition. In one specific study, athletes who were anxious about illness symptoms before competition were five times more likely to suffer an injury. [7]

That being said, sports anxiety not only prohibits athletes from experiencing flow and therefore performing below their potential. Sports anxiety is also physically dangerous for athletes.

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*Sports anxiety is directly related to enhanced self-consciousness and, therefore, completely disrupts flow.*

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## PART 3: HOW MINDFULNESS MEDITATION CAN HELP ATHLETES EXPERIENCE FLOW

### How can mindfulness meditation reduce sports anxiety and increase our likelihood to experience flow?

Recent research suggests that mindfulness meditation exercises can help athletes control negative thoughts and sports anxiety which allows them to focus on their skills in the present moment and perform better. [8]

Additionally, researchers have found that athletes with higher levels of mindfulness are more likely to experience various dimensions of flow including challenge-skill balance, clear goals, concentration, merging of action and awareness, and loss of self-consciousness [9]. This research suggests that mindfulness may be a catalyst for flow.

Here's some more proof:

- In 2009, researchers found that Mindfulness Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) training enhances flow, mindfulness, and aspects of sport confidence which could lead to improved performance. [10]
- In 2015, researchers found that Mindful Performance Enhancement, Awareness and Knowledge (mPEAK) training improves the ability to identify and describe feelings and reactions to bodily sensations which means mPEAK training could help athletes adapt to high stress and develop more resilience. [11]
- In 2016, researchers tested the effects of the Mindfulness-integrated Cognitive Behavior Therapy (MiCBT) program on cyclists. Results suggested that mindfulness-based interventions tailored to specific athletic pursuits can be effective in facilitating flow experiences and, therefore, enhancing athlete performance. [12]

The relationship between mindfulness meditation, flow, and peak performance is a relatively new field in sports psychology. Nevertheless, researchers are fairly certain that:

- Flow results from positive self-concept and self-confidence
- Flow is related to optimal performance
- Sports anxiety inhibits the flow experience
- Mindfulness meditation can help control sports anxiety

That being said, mindfulness meditation practices might be the key to reducing sports anxiety and unlocking flow so that athletes can perform optimally.



[Read more about the proven benefits of mindfulness](#)

## What is mindfulness meditation?

Let's talk about the difference between mindfulness, meditation, and mindfulness meditation. While mindfulness is often described as a state, meditation is often described as an exercise.

According to [Giovanni Dienstmann](#), meditation expert and certified teacher,

*Meditation is a mental exercise of regulating attention. It is practiced either by focusing attention on a single object, internal or external (focused attention meditation) or by paying attention to whatever is predominant in your experience in the present moment,*

*without allowing the attention to get stuck on any particular thing (open monitoring meditation).*

Mindfulness, on the other hand, is often described as a state of awareness. According to the [Greater Good Magazine at UC Berkeley](#),

*Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there's a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment.*

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*Mindfulness is a superpower, and the way to get it is through meditation.*

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Let's recap. Mindfulness is a state of being that requires self-awareness without self-judgment. By practicing this self-awareness, we can learn to simply feel our emotions without getting carried away by them. This means, that we don't let our thoughts makes us any more angry, jealous, nervous, etc. than we already feel, but we don't judge ourselves for feeling the way we feel either.

There are many different mindfulness meditation exercises we can do to improve our mindfulness in our daily lives. Similarly, athletes can practice specific mindfulness meditation exercises to improve their mindfulness as they practice their sport. Regardless of which mindfulness meditation exercises you practice, it's important to follow some basic guidelines to ensure you make the most out of the exercises. Check out these guidelines from [mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org):

## Mindfulness Meditation Guidelines

**There's no way to quiet your mind.** Quieting your mind is not the goal. The goal is to be aware of your mind.

**Your mind will wander.** When practicing mindfulness meditation, it's normal for your mind to wander and think about something that happened to you yesterday or your to-do list, for example.

**As your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the present moment.** This is the great advantage of mindfulness meditation – learning to recognize when your mind has wandered to the past or future so that you can bring it back to the present moment.

**Don't judge yourself for your wandering mind.** When you judge yourself, your mind is in the past. Instead of judging or criticizing yourself for letting your mind wander, simply bring your mind back to your breath and your body in the present moment.

**Use your breath as an anchor to the present moment.** Take deep breaths from your belly as you complete mindfulness meditation exercises. Even during body scans or muscle relaxation exercises, deep breathing is essential to connect your body and mind to the present moment.



## PART 4: MINDFULNESS MEDITATION EXERCISES FOR ATHLETES

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At Ertheo, we've collaborated with mindfulness meditation experts around the world who specialize in mindfulness meditation for athletes. Together, we've put together a list of mindfulness meditation exercises for coaches and/or athletes to incorporate into their training. Try them out with your team!

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercise with Power Pose
2. Mindful Body Scan
3. Full-Body Progressive Muscle Relaxation
4. Soccer Visualization
5. Mindful Walking Meditation



# Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercise with Power Posing

## Pavan Mehat Sustainable Athletics

### Introduction:

This exercise is a diaphragmatic breathing exercise with power posing. It should take between 5 - 10 minutes. A power pose is a powerful stance or posture. The basic idea that is if you stand like a powerful person, you'll feel more powerful and confident. In this exercise, you'll practice diaphragmatic breathing while, at the same time, practicing a power pose. The power pose will help you monitor your breathing while, at the same time, boosting your confidence.

### Set up:

Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart. Put your hands on your waist above your hip bones, so you can feel your stomach expanding as you breathe. Keep your chest out and your head held high. Imagine you're Superman.

### Instructions:

*Take a deep breath through your nose and focus on expanding your stomach. Do not just jut your stomach out but feel as if your breath is being pulled into the ground. This will result in your belly expanding in all planes not just out in front. Try to breathe so deeply that you can feel your stomach pushing out against your hands.*

*As you inhale, count 1. As you exhale, count 2. Have your exhale be as slow as possible without causing strain and allow your inhalation to happen spontaneously. Keep counting your breath until you reach the number 10. Then, start over again at one. If you lose track, it's okay. Do not judge yourself. Simply restart at number 1.*

*Try to focus only on the sensation of breathing deeply and your count. If your mind wanders to other things, simply bring your attention back to your breath, and return to counting without judgment.*

### Tip:

It might be a good idea to activate areas of your body associated with breathing correctly before beginning this exercise. Learn more about [Muscle Activation](#) by clicking [here](#).

## Body Scan Exercise

<http://mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk>

### **Instructions:**

*This should take about 15 – 20 minutes. The athlete should engage in the body scan exercise while a third party (e.g. coach) reads the script. The athletes should lay down flat on a yoga mat, or a semi-soft surface, or sit up straight with the head, neck, and back in line.*

**1.** Firstly, checking in with your body just as it is right now noticing the sensations that are present, feeling the contact the body is making with the floor.

**2.** Then, starting to scan the body, sweeping your awareness through different parts of the body, without judging what you are aware of but as best you can bringing attention to your experience moment to moment.

**3.** Starting with the crown of the head, noticing any sensations here, tingling, numbness, tightness or relaxation. Then including the head, feeling the weight of the head as it rests on the cushion, then including in awareness the forehead, noticing whether or not you can feel the pulse in the forehead, whether there is tightness or ease. Then including the eyes, the nose, cheeks, mouth and chin and finally the ears including any sounds that you notice coming to the ears. Being aware moment by moment the changing pattern of sensations, feelings of warmth, coolness, ease. If you notice your mind wandering then this is perfectly natural

and what minds do. Noticing your mind has wandered is a moment of awareness, then just gently guiding your mind back to the part of the body you are focusing on.

**4.** Then letting go of the head and face, moving your awareness into the neck and shoulders, noticing the strong muscles in this part of the body, having awareness of any tension in the neck and throat, perhaps becoming aware of the sensation of air in the throat.

**5.** Moving your awareness now to the shoulders, the places where there is contact between the shoulders and the floor, stretching your awareness into the arms, elbows, wrists, hands and fingers, aware of what is here in each moment.

**6.** Shifting the focus now to the chest area, noticing the subtle rise and fall of the chest with the in and out breath, turning your awareness to the ribcage, front and back of the ribs, sides of the ribs, the upper back resting on the floor. Noticing any aches and pains here and seeing if you can bring a sense of gentleness and kindness to these areas.

**7.** Turning your awareness now to the abdomen and stomach, the place where we feel our “gut feelings” noticing your attitude to this part of your body, seeing if you can allow it to be as it is, taking a relaxed and accepting

approach to this part of the body. Then stretching your awareness to the lower back, the lumbar spine, feeling the gentle pressure as the back meets the floor before moving your awareness to the pelvis area, the hip bones, and sitting bones, genitals and groin, noticing any sensations or lack of sensations that are here, perhaps being aware of the breath in this part of the body. Bringing a kindly attention here.

**8.** Now letting go of the torso as the centre of your awareness and moving your attention into the thighs of both legs, feeling the weight of the legs, gently noticing what other sensations there are here, tuning into the skin, bone and muscle of the legs here. If your mind has wandered into thinking, planning, worrying, day dreaming then just gently guiding it back to this part of the body.

**9.** Next turning your attention gently towards the knees, bringing a friendly attention, notice if there is any discomfort here, and if there is none then noticing what is present already here.

**10.** Stretching your attention into the calves of both legs, noticing how your muscles feel here, feeling this part of the legs from the inside out, the flesh and bone of the lower legs. And again checking in where your attention is from time to time and noticing

the quality of your attention seeing if it is possible to bring a gentleness and kindness into your awareness, not forcing yourself, bringing a lightness of touch to your attention in this part of the body.

**11.** Finally moving your attention into both feet, the heels of the feet, the instep the balls of the feet, the tops of the feet, skin and bone and finally the toes, seeing if it's possible to distinguish one toe from another. Noticing whether there is tension here, sensations, numbness, tingling and allowing any tension to soften as you bring a gentle attention to it.

**12.** Now taking one or two deeper breaths and widen your focus, filling the whole body with awareness, noticing whatever is present, sweeping the body with your awareness from top to bottom, experiencing the body from the inside out. Noticing whether there is any non-acceptance towards any parts of the body as you fill the body with a gentle awareness and seeing if you can have compassion for any judgments or for any tensions or pain that might be present as and when you notice it. Feeling the energy of life flowing through you. And resting in awareness of this amazing body that you have compassion for its pains and appreciation for its capacities and the wonder of it.

## Full-Body Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

<https://bebrainfit.com>

### **Instructions:**

*This should take about 5 minutes. The athlete should engage in the muscle relaxation exercise while a third party (e.g. coach) guides them through the exercises calling the athlete's attention to specific muscles. The athletes should lay down flat on a yoga mat, or a semi-soft surface.*

Get comfortable. Take a few deep relaxing breaths. Start by focusing on your right foot. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeeze hard and hold for 10 seconds. Relax your right foot and notice the tension flowing away. Thinking to yourself "relax" or "letting go" can help. Repeat with your left foot. Work your way up your body, tightening and releasing groups of muscles, alternating

between your right and left sides.

Concentrate on these groups of muscles in this order:

- calf
- knee
- thigh
- hip
- lower back
- abdomen
- upper back
- chest
- shoulders

Then move your focus to your hands.

- wrist
- forearm
- elbow
- upper arm
- shoulder

Finally, move your focus to your head.

- neck and throat
- face
- back of the head
- top of the head

When you are done, relax your eyes. Slowly count backwards from 5 to 1. Repeat to yourself, "Eyes open. Feeling calm and fully alert." Open your eyes and get up slowly.



## Soccer Visualization Meditation Exercise

<https://mindoversports.com>

### **Instructions:**

*This should take about 5-10 minutes. The athlete should engage in the soccer visualization meditation exercise while a third party (e.g. coach) reads the script. The athletes should lay down flat on a yoga mat, or a semi-soft surface.*

Close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply . . . and begin to count down slowly from ten to one . . . relaxing more and more deeply with each count. 10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . . feel yourself going deeper and deeper. . . into a quieter, more relaxed state of mind. . . 7 . . . 6 . . . 5 . . . deeper and more relaxed. . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . you are now in a very deep, very calm state of mind.

Now see yourself in that special spot where you are completely at peace with yourself...where you are totally happy...it may be under an oak tree in the forest, or next to a stream in the woods, or floating in a boat on a lake...it's a place you love to be because it's so peaceful. And once you're situated in that spot, then you see before you what appears to be a television screen...and as you watch that screen, you suddenly see yourself...you are on the screen...performing on the field. And see with you that one person who has always been your idol...you watch them play... you duplicate their style.. their every move is your move...you and they are one... excellent timing... excellent rhythm... you are in sync.

And also see that individual you want to excel for... the one person who, throughout your life has been an inspiration for you... the one person who has stood by you through good times and tough times. You know there are many people who love you...who care about you... they are with you... they are for you.. (PAUSE). You are relaxed...you are calm. The referee blows the whistle... the game is on.

You are running easily, freely... you feel the wind in your face... you are doing what you do best... running forward to support the ball... running back to mark your opponent. You are relaxed and calm. You see the ball... yet you see the whole field. You know what you will do with the ball before it comes to you. You know your assignments...on corner kicks... free kicks... offense... defense... you are totally prepared for this game. You are performing at your best... (PAUSE). And finally, the game is over... see yourself... tired, but happy... you are sweating... there is a towel around your neck...everyone is patting you on the back... giving you high fives hugging you... congratulating you. See yourself enjoying the reward you promised yourself. . . you did it. . . you made it happen. . . you. . . are a winner (PAUSE)

And now, take approximately 30-seconds to slowly open your eyes. Thirty Seconds.

## Theravada Walking Meditation

<https://liveanddare.com>

### **Instructions:**

*Practice this walking meditation for at least 10 – 15 minutes for optimal effect. The athlete should engage in the walking meditation while a third party (e.g. coach) reads the script. For this type of walking meditation, choose a straight path of about 30 to 40 feet long. Athletes can practice barefoot or wearing light shoes. Make sure the athlete is standing upright, with eyes cast down about a meter and a half in front (to prevent distraction), not looking at anything in particular. Follow the cues, and read the script below.*

### **Instructions:**

*As the athlete walks, read the following script slowly.*

As you walk, place all your attention at the soles of the feet, on the sensations and feelings as they arise and pass away.

Feel the legs and feet tense as you lift the leg. Feel the movement of the leg as it swings through the air. Note the sensations felt.

As the foot comes down again into contact with the path, a new feeling arises. Place your awareness on that sensation, as it is felt through the sole of the foot.

Again as the foot lifts, mentally note the feeling as it arises.

At each new step, certain new feelings are experienced and old feelings cease – feeling arising, feeling passing away, feeling arising, feeling passing away. This should be known with mindfulness. Be constantly mindful of all sensations that arise in the sole of the feet.

There is no “right” experience. Just see how the experience feels to you.

### **Instructions:**

*As the athlete come to the end of the path, read the following script: Then, continue to guide the athlete through the exercise for about 10 minutes.*

Walk back and forth along the same short path. When you come to the end of your path, come to a full stop, turn around, stop again, and then start again.

Continue to walk, paying attention to the sensations and feelings in your feet, legs, and body as they arise and pass away.

Ask yourself, “Where is my mind? Is it on the soles of the feet?” If your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the present and reestablish mindfulness.

## Tips for athletes while practicing the walking meditation

Whenever your mind wanders from this focus, you bring it back to your foot and the sensations for the contact with the ground.

Your speed might change during a period of walking meditation. See if you can sense the pace that keeps you most intimate with and attentive to the physical experience of walking.

At any time if you feel the mind is going deeply into tranquility, and you feel like just standing still, or sitting down to practice, then do so.

Try to dedicate your attention to the sensations of walking and let go of everything else. As you develop your ability of focus while walking like this, by time you can also integrate it in less formal walks in your daily life.





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