

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

Mindfulness Meditation

Intervention

SupportForSport.org



PRESENTER’S GUIDE OVERVIEW

This presenter’s guide provides a step-by-step explanation of a mindfulness meditation intervention for athletes. Participation in the “Mindfulness Meditation” intervention can be useful in managing stress and enhancing sport-related coping skills. Facilitation tips are provided.

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MINDFULNESS MEDITATION INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

Timeline: plan for 45 minutes in the first session (approximately 40 minutes of content) and 35 minutes in each subsequent session (approximately 30 minutes of content)

15 min **Introduction and Mindfulness Education** (first session only)

5 min **Introduction** (second session and beyond)

25 min **Calm Abiding Meditation**

Room set-up:

Reserve a room for the workshop. A room that allows for participants to spread out and get into a comfortable position is ideal.

Presenter preparation:

- Read the workshop guide
- Become sufficiently familiar with the background information to facilitate discussion at the beginnings and endings of sessions
- Rehearse the mindfulness meditation script if you are not using the audio recording
- Remind athletes about the workshop time and place

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION INTERVENTION PROTOCOL

1. 15 min Introduction and Mindfulness Education (first session)

“How many of you have heard the term ‘mindfulness’ before?”

“What does the term ‘meditation’ bring to mind?”

“These mindfulness meditation sessions are designed to help you to develop some skills that can benefit you both in and outside of your involvement in sport.”

“Today we’re going to start things off with some background about what mindfulness meditation is, how it works, what benefits it can have, and how you can apply it in your life. Then you’ll get a chance to try mindfulness meditation for yourselves.”

What is mindfulness meditation?

- the concept of mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist meditation practices dating back 1,000 years
- the essence of mindfulness is living nonjudgmentally in the present moment
- mindfulness meditation is a technique that helps you become better able to focus your attention on the present moment and accept experiences without judgment

What are the benefits of doing mindfulness meditation?

- mindfulness is related to multiple favorable outcomes, including:
 - reduced stress and anxiety
 - improved psychological and social well-being
- among athletes, mindfulness is related to:
 - improved athletic coping skills
 - development and maintenance of optimal sport performance

How does mindfulness meditation work?

- by learning to live more in the present, athletes are less distracted by thoughts about the past and worries about the future
- accepting experiences without judgment generates less stress and anxiety, and allows athletes to have greater calmness, clarity, focus, and efficiency

How can mindfulness be applied?

- mindfulness can be applied to any aspect of one’s life
- beyond sport, mindfulness can be applied to such areas as academics, eating, and interacting with others
- the principles of living in the moment and accepting experiences without judgment are readily applicable to many situations as you go through life

What do you need to know prior to trying mindfulness meditation?

The type of mindfulness meditation that we will be doing is called “calm-abiding meditation,” which consists of four key elements (awareness, presence, relaxed ease, and spaciousness):

- **awareness** – This is an important part of mindfulness because it helps you to become conscious of your present experience. In the meditation, you will be invited to be aware of your breathing, your thoughts, and your physical sensations and to rest in that experience without judgment. With heightened awareness, you will be better able to notice when your mind departs from the present and goes into the past or future.
- **presence** – This element of mindfulness helps you to gain emotional and physical experience of where your mind is occupied. In the meditation, emphasis will be placed on your direct experience of breathing. You will have feelings, emotions, and physical sensations that are real only in the present moment. When you focus on the present, any problems that can be traced to thinking about the past or the future may diminish.
- **relaxed ease** – The emphasis of this element of mindfulness is on being able to relax in the present moment, free of the stress and emotional, intellectual, and physical tightening that can occur when we think about the past or the future.
- **spaciousness** – This element is included to help you accept experiences without judgment and identify more appropriate patterns of action. The main emphasis of spaciousness is, as the name implies, creating more space between your breaths, thoughts, and body responses. Adding such space can assist you in decreasing your mental, emotional, and physical reactions to events, which, in turn, can enable you to relax more effectively and use your energy in more productive directions.

2. 5 min Introduction (second session and beyond)

At the beginning of each session, check in with the athletes about:

- their reflections on the previous mindfulness meditation session
- any experiences they may have had in applying mindfulness in their daily lives since the previous mindfulness meditation session
- any questions they may have about the intervention prior to the current day’s mindfulness meditation

3. 25 min Calm Abiding Meditation (every session)

“Now it’s time to do mindfulness meditation. Please put your devices aside, spread out, and get into a comfortable position.”

“Please follow along while I *go through* [or *play a recording of*] the meditation. After the words are done, there will be a period of silence for you to bring your mind more into the present moment.”

Either read the following script (after having rehearsed it prior to the session) or play the Calm Abiding Meditation audio file.

Calm Abiding Meditation

Calm abiding meditation. We will be going through four preliminary elements in the long form for this meditation. These elements are awareness, presence, relaxed ease, and spaciousness. You will also hear the word ego mentioned. Ego in this context is an aspect of consciousness that is a conditioned aspect always some deviation away from your ideal path or the path you are intended to follow. As we work with ego over the course, ego will represent a movement away from your natural state that meditation over time will help correct.

Draw your awareness to the breath. Awareness is the first of the preliminary elements. Be aware of breathing in calmness and clarity. Be aware of breathing out stress, confusion. Each breath is slightly deeper and slightly longer than the previous one, yet nothing is forced. You are moving toward your own deep, natural breath. As the breath lengthens and deepens envision on the in breath every cell of your body bathed in calmness and clarity. Envision on the out breaths every cell releasing stress, confusion. The breath reminds us that this is a natural process; just as we take in oxygen and release CO₂ we take in what is healthy for us and release what isn't. This is why seeing what ego does more clearly helps us to identify patterns that we thought were healthy but really are not healthy for us. With these deep, full breaths awareness flows naturally into the second preliminary element - presence. This is our sensory way of knowing we exist. You are present in your body with these deep breaths to experience the rise and fall of the chest and the belly, the movement of air in and out of the nose. This is your direct experience of breathing. It is not a thought, not a concept. Those won't keep you alive; it must be direct experience. Once again the breath is an incredibly helpful guide reminding us this process is natural and to experience life in the present moment because that is the only time we truly have available to us to do anything.

Ego moves us into past future thinking. The past is a memory and the future is a fantasy. The only time that is real is NOW, the present moment. So let those breaths guide you to the present moment. You might think of the present moment at the core of your being envisioning the breath riding up and down along the spinal column, an area of calmness, clarity, and safety. Yet ego will reach in and grab the awareness out of the present moment and pull it into the past-future thinking—the regrets, the remorse, the resentments, the guilt, the fears, the doubts, the insecurities, the worry. This is creating suffering and you experience it emotionally and physically. Meet this suffering as best you can with compassion and then guide the awareness back to the present moment through awareness of the breath and your direct experience of breathing. Something quite amazing happens, the suffering ends. This is very powerful. In the present moment ego cannot control what's happening. The present moment, the now is somewhat analogous to the eye of a hurricane; it's clear and safe though the winds around the eye may be terrifying and dangerous.

So rest in this present moment. As you relax, you move into that third preliminary element of relaxed ease. Because it is safe, you can relax now. When ego is pulling your awareness into the winds of the hurricane, it is not safe and that is why we are anxious and stressed. But in the present moment, in the center of our being, at the core, it is calm and clear and safe. We can relax. So allow the muscles to soften. On each out breath, release a bit more stress. With practice you can achieve a very deep state of relaxed ease. The immune system will operate optimally. It knows how to heal you and knows how to protect you, and when we stop stressing out, it can do its work. Also, the cells know how to store energy efficiently. It won't take long to realize you expend a tremendous amount of energy going past future thinking creating all sorts of suffering. But in the present moment, that energy can be stored, and you can utilize it as you need to throughout your day. With your awareness in your present and deeply relaxed, you can even envision that core of your being larger,

encompassing your whole body. Ego will try to convince you it's a very small place, you can't get there, you can't stay there, but it truly is vast.

This helps as we move into that fourth element, spaciousness. This preliminary element is subtle but powerful. If you can imagine the analogy of the fist where you squeeze the space out of your hand it is no longer relaxed, it is tight and if you thrust a sword blade between the thumb and forefinger of that fist it will cut you there will be pain and blood you will suffer. Yet if you relax and make space, the sharpest blade in the world would not cut you. Spaciousness allows us to relax into our life more fully, enjoying the openness it brings, the flow, the harmony, the freedom. It doesn't take long again to realize all these ego past future thoughts are like prison bars limiting us, restricting us, creating suffering. As we relax and make space and come back to that present moment, we are free to enjoy our life more and we are more productive.

These four simple preliminary elements all work together. To be spacious, we have to be able to relax our body also our thinking and our emotions. In order to know if we are tight and not relaxed, we need to be present in our body with those emotions and thoughts and all of this takes awareness. So as we enter silence, just allow yourself to return to the present moment to guide the awareness back to the present moment, the now when ego pulls it into past future thinking. As gently, as compassionately as you can, return to the present moment. We will now enter a period of silence...

Allow 10 minutes of silence to elapse.

After the meditation period, debrief the session with the athletes by posing questions such as:

- What was the experience like for you?
- What sorts of things did you notice during the period of silence?
- How might you apply what you experienced today to your sport between now and our next session?
- How might you apply what you experienced today in other areas of your life between now and our next session?