



Relax for optimum health

We all lead hectic lives with pressing commitments and responsibilities. Sometimes keeping up this regime places us at risk of high stress levels and potential burnout. Here are some basic ways of assessing whether you are experiencing stress, possible causes and strategies you can implement to ensure a well-balanced life.

According to Weinberg & Gould (1995) stress is when there is a substantial imbalance between physical and psychological demands placed on an individual and their response capability, under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences.

Burnout generally results after experiencing extended periods of stress, with little or no improvement.

CAUSES OF STRESS

There are many contributing factors to general and/or exercise-related stress. Some of the most common causes of stress include:

- extreme physical fatigue
- inadequate recovery time
- severe training conditions
- emotional exhaustion
- intensive training schedule
- excessive pressure

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

Both physical and psychological characteristics occur in burnout. The most common of these characteristics are listed below:

- emotional and physical exhaustion
- headaches
- sleep disturbance
- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- increased susceptibility to illness.
- low self-esteem
- loss of desire to participate
- mood changes
- apathy
- depression (low productivity, decreased performance level).

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

There are simple strategies that can significantly reduce your likelihood of suffering from stress and/or burnout.

- Ask your trainer to create a new training schedule/exercises to inject variety in your sessions to enhance your motivation and enthusiasm.
- Maintaining an adequate diet can contribute to a greater sense of overall health.
- Taking time out for a holiday will rejuvenate your mind and body.
- Setting short-term goals will ensure you receive immediate feedback and will also assist you to remain focused on your

current task, as well as enhance long-term motivation.

- Ensure you communicate openly and honestly with your trainer. You should feel free to express any concerns, frustrations, anxieties or other feelings.
- Seek out the social support of peers. One of the most effective methods for avoiding and coping with stress or burnout is relaxation training.

RELAXATION

Being relaxed ensures greater precision in your skills, clearer decision making and greater concentration levels. Individuals who can learn to relax and control their stress levels tend to enjoy life, maximise their potential and achieve desired goals more often and more easily. Relaxation breaks can be undertaken between other activities (e.g., going from work to your fitness club) and can contribute to increased levels of confidence and a healthier lifestyle. The benefits of relaxation are both physical and psychological and include:

- increases and conservation of energy over extended periods of time
- general Health benefits allow for a happier and healthier life
- illness and injuries have a greater ability to heal faster when the body and mind are relaxed and stress free.
- allows you to cope better in pressure situations in sport, life, and work
- assists in avoiding panic
- clearer decision making ability, increasing better decision making
- minimises distractions, thus increasing your ability to concentrate
- enhances memory
- increases confidence levels.

TECHNIQUES

Here are some easy techniques you can integrate into your every day life that can help avoid and/or reduce the effects of stress or burnout.

1. Sit or lie in a quiet place that is free from distractions and concentrate on your breathing or visualise yourself in pleasant, calm surroundings.
2. Take a brisk walk / exercise.
3. Massage / self massage.
4. listen to relaxation music and/or muscle relaxation tapes.
5. Learn and practice breathing exercises.

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