

# Anxiety Management

1. Learn to Manage Anxiety Effectively - Accept anxiety as part of sport. Realize that some degree of anxiety is necessary to perform well. Learn how to reduce the level of anxiety when it becomes overwhelming without losing the needed intensity.

**What can I do?** Learn breathing exercises, mind-body relaxation techniques, breathing control exercises, positive self talk to support oneself, and thought stopping techniques.

## Centering Breaths - Controlling your biology

First understand the biology of your body. When you are nervous, for example when you experience pressure during a competition, or even during a practice bout (or an exam in school), one of the first things that occurs is that your heart rate increases. Increased heart rate naturally causes people to rush what they are doing. (have you felt butterflies in your stomach, weakness in your knees, rush of thoughts, nausea, short of breath when you are nervous?)

When you are nervous during a competition, what do you feel that makes you know you are nervous?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In fencing it is important to control our actions so that we don't rush. It is also important to control the heart rate so that we can use the mind effectively. Once the heart rate gets above 120 beat per minute, the mind is not as sharp. At 150 beats per minute the mind effectively shuts down and goes into survival mode. At this rate even the best athletes will lose the ability to maintain mental acuity. Learn to control your arousal level and heart rate so that energy supplies are more available for the important other tasks needed in fencing.

An effective way to control and slow the heart rate (and your racing thoughts) is to take a deep centering breath. This can be used throughout a competition.

Your breath should last a total of 15 seconds (6,2,7) - breathe in for 6 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, breathe out for 7 seconds

Repeat until you are able to do it. Don't rush the count. In a pressure situation you will feel like rushing the breath. This is when you need it the most. Take a second one if you can't maintain the full 15 seconds. Use it in practice to have it ready for competition.

Remember - you can delay the start of a match or take time between touches easily - think of some methods of delay. During your delay take a deep breath and count slowly to yourself.

Methods of Delay:

1

2

3

(Normalization) - Realize that performance anxiety is normal but may harm performance if unrecognized and unmanaged

(Self Awareness) - Recognize when one is experiencing performance and what to do about it

(Skill Development) - Learn how to manage arousal and anxiety by developing a series of skills and practicing regularly

(Simulation) - Practice integrating the skills in sport specific situations or simulated performance conditions (in practice while fencing a pool, in a house cup), try using it before a test at school

(Implementation) - use the techniques during a competition

#### \*\*\*\*Breathing Techniques for Emotional Control

In addition to heart rate, breathing rate and depth are indicators of anxiety. Managing breathing rate and depth is a prerequisite of relaxation. Relaxation is in turn a prerequisite of visualization, a mental-preparation technique that we will explore later

Controlled Breathing — Kinesthetic Controlled Breathing:

The technique for this type of controlled breathing is as follows:

- Close your eyes.
- Feel your stomach move out; keep your chest and shoulders steady.
- Slowly inhale, feeling the air in your chest increase and your shoulders rise.
- Hold your breath.
- Slowly exhale, feeling a release in tension as your shoulders and chest drop and your stomach relaxes.
- Now shift to listening to your breathing.

Controlled Breathing — Audio-controlled Breathing The technique for this kind of controlled breathing is as follows:

- Close your eyes.
- Hear yourself slowly inhale and exhale air as you breathe.
- Slowly inhale.
- Hear the air pass through your mouth and nose.
- Feel the build-up of tension in your chest.
- Slowly release the air.
- Hear the sound of air passing through your nose and mouth