

Play Like a Champion Today

17th Annual Leadership Conference



Mindful Walking Meditation for Athletes

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Purpose

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. Researchers have also 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.

Set-Up

Prior to engaging in a mindful walk, it can be useful to do some warm-up exercises. Here are a few to consider:

Diaphragmatic Breathing with Power Pose – takes 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. As you hold your power pose, breathe through your diaphragm mindfully counting your breaths and paying attention to your mechanics.

Body Scan Exercise – takes between 15-20 minutes. The body scan begins by checking in with your body just as it is right now, noticing the sensations that are present. Next, start to scan the body, sweeping your awareness through various parts of the body, without judging what you are aware of but as best you can bring attention to your experience moment to moment.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation – takes about 5 minutes. The athlete should engage in the muscle relaxation exercise while a coach guides them through the exercises calling the athlete's attention to specific muscles, one at a time.

Visualization Meditation Exercise - This exercise should take about 5-10 minutes. The athlete should engage in the visualization meditation exercise while a coach takes them through a visualization in which the athlete sees him/herself in a special spot where they are completely at peace with him/herself...where you are totally happy...etc. As athletes expand their experience with this activity, they can begin to see themselves successfully performing specific aspects of their sport, such as taking a penalty shot/kick, scoring a goal, or overcoming a temporary setback.

NOTE: specific instructions for leading these activities are available in the free e-book available from ertheo.com: **Mindful Meditation for Athletes: Get in the Zone** (See on-line resources below.) Also, in using these activities as a set-up for a mindful walk, we don't mean to imply that they all need to be done at once. However, teaching athletes how to do these exercises ahead of time, can enhance the mindful walk experience.

A Mindful Walk

This walking meditation should last at least 10 – 15 minutes for optimal effect. The athlete should engage in the walking meditation while a coach reads the instructions.

For this type of walking meditation, choose a straight path of about 30 to 40 feet long. Athletes can practice barefoot, in stocking feet, 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 follow the steps below.

- As you begin your walk, place all your attention at the soles of your feet, on the sensations and feelings as they arise and pass away.
- Feel your legs and feet tense as you lift the leg. And take your first step. Feel the movement of your leg as it swings through the air. Note the sensations felt.
- As your front 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 your foot.
- Again, as your trailing 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 falling away, feeling arising, feeling falling away.
- This should be done with mindfulness. Be constantly mindful of all sensations that arise in the sole of your feet. There is no “right” experience. Just see how the experience feels to you.

Additional instructions for a mindful walk appear in the free e-book, **Mindfulness Meditation for Athletes: Get in the Zone**, referenced below,

Variations

Since success in athletics depends in part on the ability to balance awareness between what is happening inside your body with what is happening in the field of play, you can have your athletes focus on internal awareness as they walk out and switch to total external awareness as they walk back. Debrief on the difference in the experiences.

You can apply the principles of a mindful walk to other elements of sports such as throwing, swinging, kicking, swim strokes, etc. This can help athletes become more aware of improper mechanics.

On-Line Resources

- **Mindfulness Basics (Lesson 1)** (YouTube/Bing video)
[Lesson 1 Mindfulness Basics - Bing video](#)
- **Mindfulness Meditation for Athletes: Get in the Zone** (free eBook), includes a walking mediation
[Mindfulness Meditation for Athletes \(ertheo.com\)](#)
- **Mindful Walking for Athletes** (YouTube/Bing video)
[Mindful Walking for Athletes - Bing video](#)
- **Mindfulness for Athletes** (YouTube/Bing video)
[Mindfulness for Athletes - Bing video](#)
- **Meditation for Athletes – 10 Minute Guided Meditation** (YouTube/Bing video)
[Meditation for Athletes | 10 minutes Guided Meditation | Sport Yogi - Bing video](#)

Books

- **Mental Toughness For Young Athletes: Eight Proven 5-Minute Mindset Exercises For Kids And Teens Who Play Competitive Sports** (2020, Troy Horne)
- **Mind Gym: An Athletes Guide to Inner Excellence** (2001, Gary Mack, David Casstevens, Alex Rodriguez)
- **Mindful Coaching: Coaching the Mental Game for Young Athletes through Connection**, (2021, CG Beard)
- **Mindfulness for Student Athletes – A Workbook to Help Teens Reduce Stress and Enhance Performance** (2018, Todd H. Corbin & Gina M Biegel)
- **A Still Quiet Place for Athletes: Mindfulness Skills for Achieving Peak Performance and Finding Flow in Sports and Life**, (2018, Amy Saltzman, MD)
- **Training Athletes From The Inside Out: Yoga and Mindfulness Lesson Plans to Reduce Stress and Enhance Performance**, (2021, Tawn Turnesa)