

Chill Out About Teen Sports Pressure

Dealing With Competition

By: Mia Simonsen

In a perfect world, playing sports would always build self-esteem and social skills and be lots of fun. But when things get competitive, it can suck the fun right out of sports.

Maybe it's not that way for you. Maybe competition makes you feel excited and gives you an adrenaline rush. A little stress from competition can actually be good for your body, pumping you up and making you more alert.

But maybe competition makes you scared and anxious. After all, there's a lot of pressure to do well in high school or youth sports from parents, coaches, and teammates. Often, teens put too much pressure on themselves.

Too much stress can wipe you out. If you're always burned out, worried, and not enjoying your chosen sport, you might want to talk to your coach, take a break, or try something else.

Relaxation Techniques

If you want to get a handle on your nerves, you can try mind/body relaxation techniques to center yourself before competition. They can really work!

- **Deep breathing:** Inhale and hold your breath for five seconds, then exhale slowly. Repeat five times.
- **Muscle relaxation:** Tighten your muscles, moving slowly from your head down to your toes. Keep each set of muscles tense for five seconds, then release.
- **Positive visualization:** Close your eyes and imagine being in a calm and beautiful place. Then imagine making a play, hitting a ball, or scoring a goal over and over again. This will help you build self-confidence.

More Sporting Tips

There are some basic steps in conditioning mind and body that applies to anyone motivated to be fit, not just teen athletes, but they can be hard habits to adopt. Persistence pays off. Start with basics:

- Eat well, especially on game day, and get plenty of rest the night before a competition.

- Take a break when you're tired of training and find a distraction that's fun (going to the movies, seeing friends, etc.). But don't party the night before a competition—that's not a healthy distraction!
- Don't worry about making mistakes or what others think. You and your teammates should support each other. Remember—you don't have to be perfect!
- Train with the same intensity as you would if you were competing. Train to win!
- To be in top physical condition, you need to eat right, rest, and drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercise.
- Keep a positive outlook—always imagine yourself doing your best.
- Believe in yourself and your team. When you're confident, your mind and body can relax so you can do your best.

It's great to win games or be the best at your chosen sport. But if you think that winning is everything and losing is not an option, then you're probably in for a dose of worry and disappointment. Have a more positive attitude and focus on doing your best, supporting your team, and being a good sport (and not so much on winning or losing). This has an added bonus: you'll probably have a lot more fun.

This article was reviewed by BodiMojo expert Tara Cousineau, Ph.D.