

THREE WHAT'S

Managing Pressure



What

In Elite Sport we often hear the expression '*pressure is a privilege*' meaning only the top performers ever get to experience being the focus of attention, perform in front of the biggest crowds and for the highest stakes. These types of pressures are not felt by most of us, but the emotions we feel can be equivalent and equally real.

Pressure comes when we *feel* vulnerable and unable to manage ourselves, or the moment, usually in situations we deem to be of high importance, crucial to maintaining our status and coming with what we believe will be adverse consequences.

So What?

It can be understood and managed. Think of a situation which makes you feel under pressure. It may be in the workplace, a domestic situation or an activity which, for you, has significance. How do you respond?

Typically, we respond in two ways: the first is emotional and cognitive, the second is physiological. One leads to the other. The first we call trait anxiety, an inherent inclination to perceive certain stimuli as threatening. The second we call state anxiety, which involves increased levels of physiological arousal, apprehension, fear, and tension. Sustained over time, this leads to stress and ill health.

Now What?

Try these methods to help you manage the pressure.

- **Disable the consequences** – place any possible fall-out in a longer-term context. Re-framing in this way can unsettle old behaviours and help us recognise a better approach.
- **Scrutinise your sources** – what exactly is causing pressure? Test your sources. How much of what we believe to be real is exaggerated and caused by our own 'catastrophising'?
- **Tidy your house** – there are small things we can do which not only make us feel better they reduce aggravation: have that difficult conversation, empty your email folder, hold that meeting.
- **Control the controllables** – don't fret over stuff that's out of control or beyond your pay scale!
- **Rehearse success** – top performers inoculate against stressors by pressure training, rehearsing scenarios, practising coping strategies and doing so repeatedly

Top performers can, and do, choke under pressure. A global audience watching you miss successive putts is not comfortable. They practice so the moment never comes. For the rest of us we have to manage ourselves as best we can. Our Playbook on Managing Pressure is the best place to start.

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