

The M-Zone: Mindful Breathing for Athletes

Mindfulness is the secret sauce for many elite and professional athletes. How can simple mindfulness breathing techniques help you?

- Enhanced motor coordination (speed, timing, hand-eye)
- Improved ability to regulate emotions in highly stressful situations
- Increased focus and concentration
- Faster information processing

Instructions for M-Zone breathing

Switch to diaphragmatic breathing. If you are having trouble, try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in and falling about an inch as you breathe out. (Visualize a balloon inflating and deflating). You should not see the chest or the shoulders moving. (*Hint: If this is still difficult, lie on your back or on your stomach; you will be more aware of your breathing pattern.* Remember, it is impossible to breathe diaphragmatically if you are holding in your abdominal muscles. Relax your abdominal muscles.)

Pre and Post Workout Breathing:

Version 1: As you inhale, count very slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself, “one, two, three, four”, as you exhale, you say to yourself, “four, three, two, one”. Do this several times.

Version 2: As you inhale, count one and exhale count one, continue counting both the inhale and the exhale until you reach 10.

Activation Breathing: (4-7-8)

Use this type of breathing for quick, effective targeted concentration in potentially highly stressful situations. It is often called 4-7-8 breath and will rapidly road block an overactive stress response. Breathe in for 4 counts, hold breath for 7 counts, exhale for 8 counts. After 3 repetitions, return to normal breathing for a couple of breaths, then repeat as necessary.

