

# How to Be Mentally Prepared Before a Game

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Mental preparation is an important part of an athlete's performance. Techniques such as visualization and positive self-talk can allow you to turn negative energy into focus and confidence, which will help you play your best during a game. To mentally prepare for a big game, develop a pre-game routine, get a good night's sleep the night before, and practice meditation for focus.

Method  
1

## Method 1 of 3: Focusing Right Before a Game



**1 Take deep breaths to calm yourself.** If you feel yourself getting jittery and nervous, take some deep breaths. Inhale and exhale deeply, pulling from the diaphragm. This will help calm your pulse down to a healthy rate and let you focus on the game.<sup>[1]</sup>



**2 Go for a walk to relax.** Any light aerobic exercise can calm your nerves and boost your mood, so take a short walk if your nerves become overwhelming. Running or sprinting will use up valuable energy, so stick to 10-20 minutes of brisk walking or strolling. Light exercise releases endorphins, which can help soothe your nerves.[2]



**3 Listen to some music to manage strong emotions.** Whether you need some calming music to help soothe the jitters or energetic music to psych you up, make or find a playlist to listen to before the game. Put some headphones in or listen on a speaker with some teammates to immerse yourself in the music.[3]

- Genres with driving beats and aggressive lyrics, such as pop, hip hop, or rap, are perfect for pumping yourself up pre-game.
- Listen to instrumental music or songs with positive, inspiring lyrics if you need to help bring your nervous energy back down to a healthy level of excitement.[4]



**4 Meditate for 10 minutes to relax your body and mind.** If you find yourself overwhelmed and tense on game day, try a short meditation session. To practice meditating, sit in a comfortable, quiet place. Close your eyes, clear your mind, and focus on deep breathing for 10-20 minutes. This can help you rein in your stress and channel it into focus.[5]



**5 Visualize your ideal successful performance.** Before the game, imagine successful past games or future performances. Envision yourself swishing all your shots, hitting a home run, scoring a goal, or running in a touchdown. Mentally rehearsing a successful game beforehand can give you confidence in your abilities and improve your performance.[6]

- Make the scenario as realistic as possible—imagine details such as sights, sounds, feelings, and smells. Imagine yourself being successful in this scenario over and over again.[7]



- 6 Hydrate with water as well as sports drinks to keep your mind sharp.** Within two hours of the game, drink 17 to 20 fl oz (0.50 to 0.59 L) of water. This will hydrate your body as well as keep your mind clear and focused. Remember to also hydrate daily—teenage and adult athletes should drink at least 80 to 100 fl oz (2.4 to 3.0 L) of water a day.<sup>[8]</sup>
- You should also drink 1 or 2 sports drinks the morning of the game, such as Gatorade or Powerade, to boost your carbohydrates and electrolytes.<sup>[9]</sup>



## Method 2 of 3: Establishing a Routine



**1 Make a routine to distract you from the pre-game stress.** The night before the game, it's easy to get caught up in nerves and find yourself pacing around. Instead, find 1 or 2 techniques that help calm you down. Make these techniques a simple routine to go through the night before a game, or even right before the game starts.<sup>[10]</sup>

- Many athletes listen to a certain set of songs, bounce a ball, or drink a certain beverage for their pre-game ritual to reduce jitters and condition themselves to stay calm under stress.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Avoid making your routine superstitious—you don't need to complete a ritual in order to perform well. This routine is only meant to help keep your mind off stress before a game and focus your energy.



- 2 Practice embracing your nerves.** The flood of adrenaline that comes with pre-game nerves is exactly what you need to stay sharp and play at your peak. Anticipate that “buzz” feeling so it won’t throw you off, and embrace it.<sup>[12]</sup>
- If you start to feel that “butterflies in your stomach” sensation, take some deep breaths and tell yourself, “This is my body telling me I’m ready to play.”



**3 Turn negative self talk into affirmations.** Be extra intentional about tracking your inner monologue during the days before a big game. Stay aware of any negativity that may stem from pressure and expectations, and take action to turn these thoughts into positive encouragements. It may feel forced at first, but even just telling yourself positive thoughts can have a powerful mental effect.<sup>[13]</sup>

- For example, if you find yourself thinking, “I can’t do this,” turn that thought into, “I can do this. I’ve practiced and prepared for this, and I know I can do my best.”
- Your inner monologue may focus on external pressure, such as “I’m going to fail in front of everyone and let my team down.” Instead, tell yourself, “I am going to work hard and try my best. I will make my team proud.”
- Even just thinking basic affirmations such as “be strong,” “focus on success,” and “give everything” can psych you up and boost your confidence.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Method 3 of 3: Maintaining Good Habits



**1 Eat well before the game to maintain your energy level.** Game day nutrition varies depending on the sport, but generally you should be eating a low-protein, low-fat meal the night before as well as 4-6 hours before the game. You should also snack throughout the day—once 2-3 hours before the game and once an hour before the game—to keep your energy levels up.

- A good game day meal could include pasta, potatoes, beans, nuts, rice, bread, and fruits.
- Your snacks should be small and easily digestible, such as nuts, dried fruits, and pretzels.





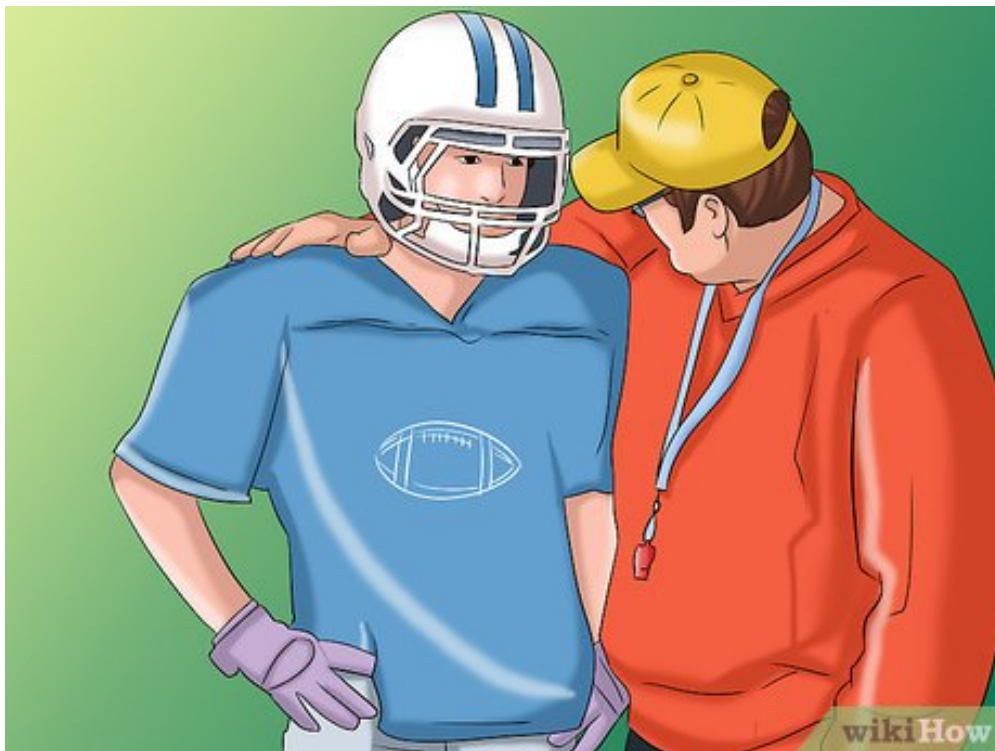
**2 Get a good night's sleep before the game.** Quality sleep can improve your speed, accuracy, and reaction time, so it's important to get at least a full 7 to 9 hours the night before a game.<sup>[15]</sup> Practice deep breathing, tension relaxation cycles, and meditation to help you clear your mind, tune out a busy inner monologue, and fall asleep more easily.<sup>[16]</sup>

- Don't eat or use your phone too close to bedtime, as these can negatively affect your sleep cycle.



**3 Practice the skills you'll need to succeed.** This may seem obvious, but practicing is crucial to your mental preparation and performance. When you put in practice, you can go into the game with confidence, trust in your abilities, and rely on instincts based on muscle memory.

- Typically, you should practice for at least an hour 5 to 6 times a week.<sup>[17]</sup>



**4 Prepare yourself for any mistakes or obstacles.** Just as you would visualize your ideal performance, visualize different situations with non-ideal circumstances. Don't focus on the negativity of these scenarios--instead, imagine how you will respond when something goes wrong. This way, you're less likely to be surprised and thrown off when something does go wrong.

- This practice also assures you, because now you'll have a game plan for any possible outcome.



**5 Think about the people who believe in you.** Whether that's your parents, coach, family, or friends, keep your biggest supporters on your mind. Their confidence in you will encourage you and help you have confidence in yourself. Make a habit of thinking about your supporters whenever you're feeling nervous or uncertain.

- Envision your loved ones' faces before you play and tell yourself, "These are people I love and admire, and they believe in me. I can do this."



## Expert Q&A

### Question

**How can I turn my anxiety into excitement?**



**Francisco Gomez**

Fitness Coach  
Expert Answer

Some people create a mantra that they repeat while they're training and right before they compete. You can also pray, focus on your breathing, or listen to music to relax. You can even use imagery, where you picture yourself doing the activity or exercise you're about to do, but in your mind you're performing it at a really high level, which can make you feel more confident in your ability.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0

### Question

**How can I stay focused and not let my nerves get the best of me?**



Community Answer

Take deep breaths before and think positive thoughts. Focus your mind on what you need to do and on encouraging your teammates.

Helpful 35 Not Helpful 5

### Question

**How can I stay calm before a track meet, when I know I'm not the fastest runner?**



Community Answer

Just focus on doing your personal best. Don't think about anyone else; just focus on running your personal best.

Helpful 29 Not Helpful 2

### Question

**How do I prepare for a soccer game knowing that I'm one of the worst ones on the team?**



Community Answer

Just focus on being a team player; if you have to ride the bench, be a good cheerleader for your teammates. If you are playing, focus on playing smart and don't let little mistakes get in your head.

Helpful 26 Not Helpful 6

### Question

**What do I do when pressure is rising?**



Community Answer

Take deep breaths and remind yourself that this is what you have been training for. Your hard work will pay off, so just relax and have fun!

Helpful 30 Not Helpful 4

#### Question

### How do I get ready for a pickleball tournament?



Community Answer

Practice a lot, work on your skills, and be confident with your abilities.

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 1

#### Question

### How do I confuse our opponents?



Community Answer

Try to set up a plan. In that plan there should be something that you can do that your opponent won't understand or not think right for a moment.

Helpful 34 Not Helpful 7

#### Question

### How do I mentally get ready for a soccer game?



Community Answer

Talk to someone who your close with on the team. Think about how your going to play. Visualize yourself playing well. Be confident.

Helpful 21 Not Helpful 4

#### Question

### What are some tips for not getting nervous before a volleyball game?



Community Answer

Take deep breaths and realize that if you miss a ball once, you'll have plenty more chances. Even the best athletes mess up sometimes. Just do your best.

Helpful 29 Not Helpful 4

#### Question

### This is my first game, and I want to remember all the rules. How do I relax my nerves and focus?



Community Answer

Study the rules well beforehand. Then, be present in the game. What helped me was encouraging other people and watching them do well, which made me do well.

Helpful 8 Not Helpful 2

[See more answers](#)



## Tips

- If you have a pre-game routine, don't try to add an extra step or change it up right before a game. This could be distracting and may throw you off. Instead, plan out your routine at least a few days beforehand and practice it until it becomes second nature.

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## About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Francisco Gomez**. Francisco Gomez is the Head Coach at the FIT Potato Gym, a training gym established in 2001 in the San Francisco Bay Area. Francisco is a former competitive runner who helps endurance athletes train for major marathons like the Boston Marathon. Francisco specializes in Injury Rehab, Flexibility, Marathon Training, and Senior Fitness. He has a B.S. in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology & Running. This article has been viewed 278,789 times.

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