

TOP TIP #10

Put your own mask on before helping others.

Mental health concerns continue to be on the rise post-COVID-19. While much of the sport research has focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the athletes, coaches are NOT immune to its effects. In fact, abundance of literature that highlights the significant role of stress, burnout, and other mental health concerns among coaches has been published pre- and post-COVID-19.



While many coaches chose to be coaches because they are passionate about their sport, it is important to recognize that coaches, just like everyone else deserves to “put their own mask on before helping others.” Given the significant consequences of long-term stress, coaches should make their own health a priority. An imbalance between stress and recovery can lead to other negative consequences such as burnout, autoimmune and weight issues, certain types of cancer, heart problems, and chronic pain.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

“Stress is a natural part of being a human and can be associated with both positive and negative experiences. In general, stress itself is not usually the problem, but lack of adequate coping skills can be. When a person is not coping well, it can lead to lack of balance, impairments in physical health, strained social relationships, and decreased mental wellbeing.”

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

Coping: Thoughts and behaviors used to manage external and internal demands that the individual finds stressful and more than they can manage.

Mental Health: A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.

Stress: A state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives.

Critical Questions:

1. How does stress affect my health, life, and relationships?
2. How do I typically cope with stressful situations? Are my coping strategies healthy? Or harmful?
3. To what extent do “I practice what I preach” by taking care of my own health?
4. What is the ONE thing I could easily change to improve my own health?

Typical Signs and Symptoms of Stress:

(adapted from CMHS (Rev. Ed., 2000).

Physical Responses:

- Racing pulse and rapid breathing
- Increased blood pressure
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea, uneasy feeling in your stomach
- Increased or decreased appetite which may be accompanied by weight loss or gain
- Sweating or chills
- Sweaty and cold hands
- Trembling hands, knees, lips, and voice
- Tremors or muscle twitching
- Muffled hearing
- Tunnel vision or other vision changes
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Headaches
- Sore or aching muscles
- Light sensitive vision
- Lower back pain
- Dry mouth and feeling a "lump in the throat"
- Easily startled
- Fatigue that does not improve with sleep
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Decreased resistance to colds, flu, infections
- Flare up of allergies or asthma
- Hair loss

Behavioral Responses:

- Decreased efficiency and effectiveness
- Difficulty communicating
- Increased sense of humor/gallows humor
- Irritability, outbursts of anger, frequent arguments
- Inability to rest, relax, or let down
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in performance
- Change in school work (missing assignments, getting poor grades)
- Periods of crying
- Increased use of stimulants such as sugar or caffeine
- Hyper-vigilance of the surrounding environment
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Accident prone
- Change in social media use
- Change in shopping habits

Typical Signs and Symptoms of Stress (cont.)

Emotional Responses:

- Denial
- Anxiety or fear
- Worry about safety of self or others
- Irritability or anger
- Restlessness
- Sadness, moodiness, grief, or depression
- Vivid or distressing dreams
- Guilt or "survivor guilt"
- Feeling overwhelmed, helpless or hopeless
- Feeling isolated, lost, lonely or abandoned
- Apathy
- Feeling misunderstood or unappreciated

Cognitive Responses:

- Memory problems/forgetfulness
- Disorientation
- Confusion
- Slowness in thinking, analyzing, or comprehending
- Difficulty calculating, setting priorities or making decisions
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Limited attention span
- Loss of objectivity
- Inability to stop thinking about the stress

Social Responses:

- Withdrawing or isolating from people
- Difficulty listening
- Difficulty sharing ideas
- Difficulty engaging in mutual problem solving
- Blaming
- Criticizing
- Intolerance of group process
- Difficulty in giving or accepting support or help
- Impatient with or disrespectful to others

