

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Controlling Your Body's Energy Level for Competition

I always get excited at the biggest races, so that doesn't make me nervous, but I have never been so excited as in the World Championships. I was totally wired from breakfast on, because I knew I could do really well. I was so worked up that my legs were shaking in the ski lift going up the mountain. I always do best when I have really high energy.

Downhill Ski Racer Hillary Lindh
Gold Medalist 1997 World Championships

I got so pumped up for my race that my body was at 150%! My warm-up was perfect, then it started raining and they delayed my event for hours. By the time they ran the race, I was flat as a pancake, and I couldn't get my energy level back up. It was my worst race in three years. I had no plan, no way to control my energy when the schedule changed...

Former National Champion, after losing his title

Components of Energy Management

Energy management can be the difference between winning and losing at Nationals, Worlds, or the Olympics. To know if you have good energy management skills, think about these three areas:

1. What Affects Your Energy Level? At the most basic level, you can't perform at a high level without enough energy, just as you can't drive a car without gas, watch TV without electricity, or listen to your walkman without batteries. Athletes must have good stores of energy and use them wisely. It is tough to watch a talented athlete fade at the end of a race because she went out too fast. Another example is the athlete who competes well all day and then runs out of gas in the medal rounds, when he needs to be at his toughest.

2. Is Your Energy At The Right Level? At the highest levels, Olympic medals are often won or lost based on the proper control of an athlete's energy level. Too low, and you may not have the intensity you need to battle a tough opponent. Too high, and you may be too wired or nervous to perform a complicated skill. Hillary Lindh

needed exceptionally high energy levels to race at 80 mph, but many other athletes need to be calm and relaxed to be at their best.

3. *Can You Control Your Energy Level?* Every athlete feels pressure. Mentally skilled athletes can stay relaxed enough to perform, despite that pressure. This is a skill that takes practice and experience. On the other hand, there are times when an athlete needs to “raise their game” by bearing down, raising their energy level, and mentally picking themselves up. The best athletes have quick control of their energy levels.

How Am I Doing? Rating Your Own Energy Management Skills

Rate each of the items listed below to assess your awareness and use of energy management skills.

0 = Never

1 = Sometimes

2 = Almost Always

- ___ 1. I know what energy level I need to be at to perform my best.
- ___ 2. I can get through training sessions without dragging.
- ___ 3. I never feel like my energy is "out of control" at a competition.
- ___ 4. I have a relaxation exercise that calms me down within seconds.
- ___ 5. I feel rested and ready for competitions.
- ___ 6. I know how to quickly raise my energy level if I am flat for a competition.
- ___ 7. I use relaxation exercises to recover from workouts.
- ___ 8. I listen to my body at competitions, to know whether I am too wired or too flat.
- ___ 9. I know what takes my energy away at competitions.
- ___ 10. I know what gives me energy at competitions.
- ___ **Total** (add up your answers)

If your score added up to:

15 - 20: You are highly skilled at energy management, and control your energy well. This chapter should be a review for you, with perhaps some new skills to try.

8 - 14: Keep working. You're on the right track, but can still develop better control of your energy management skills.

0 - 7: You need to get working. Energy management is not yet a strength for you, so you should be able to learn a great deal from this chapter.

Exercises to Develop Your Energy Management Skills

Energy Management Exercise 1: What Affects Your Energy Level?

List three things that **drain** your physical and emotional "batteries" for **training** (things that make you feel drained, tired, or flat for practices):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three things that **charge** your physical and emotional "batteries" for **training** (things that make you feel fired up, high energy, or psyched for practices):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three things that **drain** your physical and emotional "batteries" for **competition** (things that make you feel drained, tired, or flat while competing):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three things that **charge** your physical and emotional "batteries" for **competition** (things that make you feel fired up, high energy, or psyched while competing):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How much control do you have over these charges and drains? One key step in increasing your energy for training and competition is to take charge of your environment, adding as many charges as you can, and eliminating as many drains as you can. Make an energy plan for competitions, and then make one for daily training sessions.

Energy Management Exercise 2: Finding the Correct Energy Level

Athletes are at a great advantage if they know what energy level works best for them. We know, from research and practical experience with elite athletes, that athletes can be over-energized leading to nervousness, muscle tension, or overaggressiveness. We have also seen athletes who simply can't get "fired up" enough to focus all their energies on a performance. One way to picture the correct energy level is to use the example of a thermometer. Too low, you may not be warmed up enough to compete your best; too high, and you may not be able to focus enough on the job at hand.



TOO LOW



JUST RIGHT



TOO HIGH

To figure out the ideal energy level for you, think of your 3 best and 3 worst performances. Try your best to remember how your body felt before and during those performances.

	Muscle Tension	Heart Rate	Breathing	Anxiety
Best Performances	low----high	low----high	low----high	low----high
Worst Performances	low----high	low----high	low----high	low----high

Now, try to specifically remember times when your energy level has been too **high** to train or compete at your best. Describe what your body felt like at that time:

What does your body feel like when you have an energy level too **low** to train or compete?

Given what you've learned, think about what your body feels like when your energy level is "just right."

**Energy Management Exercise 3a: Gaining Control Of Your Energy Level
Relaxation Exercise**

Do you have a sure-fire way to get relaxed in just a few seconds? If not, you can! The exercise below has been used by hundreds of athletes to quickly get relaxed. This exercise needs to be practiced (especially when you are feeling too nervous), in order for you to get good control of this skill. If you have a different exercise that allows you to get control of your body at your biggest competitions, you don't have to change, but this technique has helped athletes stay calm before Olympic medal performances. **This brief relaxation exercise only takes 10 seconds!**

1. Get physically comfortable, uncross your arms and legs, and close your eyes.
2. Begin to notice how you are breathing. Is it fast or slow? Put a hand on your stomach to see if you can feel your stomach rising and falling with each breath.
3. In a minute you will take two deep breaths and hold them for 2 seconds. **As you exhale each time, you will say something to yourself.**
 - A. As you exhale the first time say to yourself: **"Relaaxx"**
 - B. As you exhale the second time say to yourself: **"Relaxed And Ready"**
4. Now practice:
 - A. Take a deep breath, from your diaphragm, hold it, exhale and now to yourself, say **"Relaaaxx"**
 - B. Good. Now take another deep breath, hold it, exhale say to yourself: **"Relaxed And Ready"**
5. Remember the keys of relaxation:
 - A. Breathing Easily
 - B. Reduce Muscle Tension
 - C. Give Your Mind A Focus
6. The goal is to learn to have better control of your body and mind--this will come with continued practice.

Energy Management Exercise 3b: Gaining Control Of Your Energy Level Energizing or "Psych Up" Techniques

If you find, instead, that you need to be **psyched up** more than relaxed before competitions, you may want to try some of these "athlete-tested" psych-up techniques:

1. Listening to energizing music. Athletes we work with often will make their own, personalized "psych up" tapes that they can listen to pre-competition to help them get into their best "high energy" frame of mind. (Obviously, this can also be a good way to relax if you choose slow, soothing music instead!)

The USOC Sport Psychology staff can also help you to create your own personalized psych up or relaxation tapes. See the Resource chapter (Chapter 10) for our contact information.

2. Using "high energy" cue words to remind yourself of how you want to feel. Words or phrases like, "energy", "I'm pumped", etc. can actually help increase your energy. Also try picturing high energy images (i.e., a locomotive or a running lion) as an alternative way to use your mind to increase your energy.

3. Reminding yourself very clearly of past, successful performances to help psych you up. See Chapter 2 to improve your ability to vividly recall these experiences via imagery.