



## GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)

Competitive sport can be stressful for athletes. Organizational pressures, performance outcomes, and personal stressors are a few of the experiences that can weigh heavily on an athlete. Anxiety is a common byproduct of chronic stress.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** is marked by

- Chronic, excessive and what seems like uncontrollable worry
- Feeling on edge
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling irritable
- Muscle tension not due to exercise or physical ailments
- Problems with sleep



**One out of 12 people in Canada may experience GAD**

in their lifetime. A study of elite Canadian athletes in 2021 indicated that **18.8% reported moderate to severe GAD<sup>1</sup>**. GAD can be:

- **Mild:** bothersome but does not interfere with workouts, practices, or performance
- **Moderate:** Hard to stay on track with workouts, training and performance
- **Severe:** Very difficult to start and complete daily routines and daily activities and can affect close relationships

GAD can make some people anxious in social situations. Sometimes, panic attacks and depression, as well as other mental illnesses, may be accompanied by GAD. If not effectively treated, GAD can have lasting implications on your athletic career and physical health (i.e. heart disease, diabetes, cancer).



## TREATMENT STRATEGIES

**Psychological Treatment:** GAD is treatable. It has been shown through research that there are skills you can learn in psychological treatment to decrease your anxiety, help you gain control over your thoughts and improve your daily life. Treatment can help you learn how to:



- Think in an **evidence-based** way
- **Experiment with actions** to cope with uncertainty
- Use your imagination to **confront your fears**
- Problem-solve solutions to **address your concerns**
- **Use tools to help you** with the physical parts of anxiety, like breathing too quickly or holding your breath

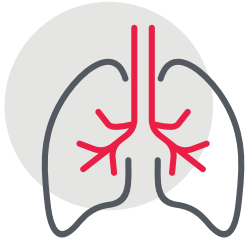
Psychological treatment can help. One Canadian study showed that 77% of people treated in short-term therapy (16 sessions) with some of the above skills remained GAD-free one year later.

**Medications:** Although psychological treatments are often effective on their own, medications are available for treating GAD in combination with psychotherapy when warranted. The recommended amount of time to take this medication varies; your physician will guide you. As with any medication, athletes choosing this form of treatment should be aware of any possible sport-related conflicts (i.e., WADA). Talk to your physician about potential side effects and the average time to experience benefits.





## TIPS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY



**Breathing Exercises:** Diaphragmatic breathing exercises, such as The Soldier’s Breath or Box Breathing, can help reduce tension in the body and help the brain shift concentration away from anxiety-inducing stimuli.

**Release Tension:** If you can, open your body, pushing your sternum forward and your shoulders gently down and back. Keep your feet and legs separated and your hands unclenched if you can. This will help reduce cortisol levels (stress) and release endorphins (the “feel good” chemicals).



**Change Your Inner Dialogue:** Rewire your brain from “What if something bad is going to happen?” to “What if something good happens?” It is important not to shift towards toxic positivity but to be realistic about the situation.

**Be Present:** Anxiety is future thinking (your imagination); bring yourself back to the present moment by focusing on sensory information (i.e. I feel this, I hear this, I smell this, etc.).



Visit [Anxiety Canada](https://www.anxietycanada.com/) for helpful tips and tricks.

**CONTACT YOUR COPSIN GAME PLAN ADVISOR OR MENTAL HEALTH LEAD FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANXIETY AND TO GET CONNECTED TO THE RIGHT RESOURCES.**