



Perfectionism is a complex, multidimensional personality style that combines excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluation¹. It is associated with many psychological, interpersonal, and achievement-related difficulties. Perfectionism is not a disorder but a vulnerability factor that can increase the likelihood of developing a mental health disorder(s).

PERFECTIONISM VS STRIVING

Many people confuse perfectionism with achievement striving or conscientiousness. Achievement striving and conscientiousness involve appropriate and tangible expectations and create a sense of satisfaction and rewards. However, perfectionism is a maladaptive pattern of behaviours, unrealistic expectations, and intangible goals that can result in a constant lack of satisfaction, producing stress and feelings of failure even when the individual is achieving success or others see them as successful.

STRIVING	PERFECTIONISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting high personal performance standards • Self-directed goals • Desire to improve skills and build mastery • Remaining accountable to self and others • Improves sport performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overtraining • Resentment toward coaches or teammates • Lying about or hiding injuries • Self-doubt • Low self-worth • Low motivation • Early retirement from sport



Many athletes describe themselves as perfectionists, crediting perfectionism as a source of motivation and essential for athletic success. However, many athletes also state that the need to “be perfect” causes feelings of worry, anxiety, problems with sleep, and interferes with relationships with family and friends.

Adapted from Canadian Psychological Association “Psychology Works” Fact Sheets. Available at: <https://cpa.ca/psychology/fact-sheets/>.

1. Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 14(5), 449-468. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01172967>

2. Hill, A. P., Mallinson-Howard, S. H., & Jowett, G. E. (2018). Multidimensional perfectionism in sport: A meta-analytical review. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 7(3), 235-270. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000125>



DIMENSIONS OF PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism involves **three major** components:

- 1 Traits:** Requirements for the self to be perfect, requirements that others should be perfect, perception that others (i.e., parents, coaches, others in general) require oneself to be perfect.
- 2 Behaviours:** Presentation of a perfect self-image to others, avoidance or concealment of any behaviour that others could judge as imperfect, avoidance of disclosing imperfections to others.
- 3 Thoughts:** Negative thoughts centred around the need to be or appear perfect, harsh self-criticism, worry over errors, self-blame.

EFFECTS OF PERFECTIONISM

- **Contributes to and increases the likelihood of mental illnesses** (i.e. eating disorders (EDs), depression, suicidality).
- **Problems in relationships** by setting unrealistic standards for themselves and others.
- **Physical health problems** (i.e. chronic stress, insomnia, headaches, and cardiovascular illness).
- **Burnout, fear of failure, procrastination, self-sabotage** (where individuals spend time finding excuses for poor performance rather than preparing for performance).

TREATMENT FOR PERFECTIONISM

Because perfectionism is a personality style, therapy is the best approach to treatment. Therapy tends to be intensive and longer-term (often more than a year). Research has shown that group and individual therapy can help change perfectionistic behaviours, thoughts, and associated difficulties. For self-help strategies to address perfectionism, visit national or provincial/territorial online resource centres.

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