

RELAXATION

Steve Podborski, Olympic Bronze Medallist in alpine skiing,
on the importance of relaxation.

*“You need a certain amount of tension to be able to go.
On the other hand, if you’re too far gone, you just go off the deep end, you lose control.
So it’s just being able to find that little narrow comfort zone.”*

Do you know what your comfort zone is? Relaxation is a technique that can help you get into your zone. More specifically, it can help you **regulate** your intensity and **decrease** it to an optimal level for the task you need to perform.

As previously mentioned in the section on stress, if you have a tendency to get over-intense and perceive things negatively, you should first try to change your perceptions to embrace stress and accept it as a positive aspect of performance. You can accompany these actions with a decrease in your intensity through **relaxation**. High-performance athletes have reported using relaxation quite extensively when training and competing, particularly under pressure.

There is no doubt that there are both physiological and psychological effects of relaxation. Some of the major **physiological** benefits are:

- ✦ Decreased heart rate
- ✦ Decreased breathing rate
- ✦ Decreased muscle tension or activity

When you relax, your heart can conserve energy by pumping blood at a slower rate. You also breathe slower, therefore you don’t have to consume as much oxygen as you normally would to perform an activity. Finally, your muscles are loose and your movements are not inhibited in any way by tension or tightness.

On the other side of the coin, **psychological** benefits include an increased ability to:

- ✦ Stay calm and cool
- ✦ Shift thoughts to more positive ones
- ✦ Be more assertive, focused and confident
- ✦ Control fear and anger
- ✦ Engage in mental imagery

Imagine the following scenario. Try to imagine it as if it was real, as if you were really there, going through all the emotions:

You are at the Olympics. You are expected to win a gold medal for your country and it is now exactly one hour before the competition. The stands are filling up quickly and there is a lot of traffic on the pool deck. You are trying to prepare yourself for the final game but the noise in the crowd is overwhelming. As the time approaches, you feel more and more nervous. Your muscles are tightening, and this is stressing you out. You are losing your focus and starting to doubt your ability to perform. You are afraid of not living up to people’s expectations.

Stop right here! If you ever find yourself in that situation or in a similar one, you need to regain control of yourself immediately. You must breathe calmly, loosen your muscles and shift your thoughts to more positive ones. Relaxation can help you do this. It can help you when you are feeling good, but more importantly when you are feeling bad, such as in the previous scenario.

Successful athletes are often able to relax **automatically**. Just like you don't have to think about walking because you do it unconsciously, some athletes don't have to think about getting relaxed. They are so good at it that when they feel the need to loosen up or clear their thoughts, they can do it instantly or in a matter of minutes. Are you able to do this? This type of relaxation, sometimes called "**one breath relaxation**," can play an important role in your pre-competition preparation. It can also be an effective strategy to regain full focus during competition, and to return to a balanced, controlled state of mind after competition.

Relaxation is a skill that can be developed with practice. Unfortunately, it usually doesn't happen overnight. Therefore, unless you have done relaxation in the past, you should learn how to do it step by step, just like you would learn any other type of skill. The good thing is that with a little bit of time and effort, relaxation does become automatic so that you can eventually skip some of the steps to get an immediate response. Some people take longer than others to develop this skill, however, most people can see improvements after a couple of weeks.

Note that there are a number of relaxation techniques that have been developed over the years, each of them involving different procedures. There are **mind-to-muscle** techniques, such as meditation, autogenic training, passive progressive relaxation, and self-hypnosis, and there are **muscle-to-mind** techniques like one breath relaxation and Jacobson's active progressive relaxation, which involves tensing muscle groups before relaxing them.

a) Passive Progressive Relaxation

Here are 8 steps you can follow to learn a type of *mind-to muscle* relaxation, more specifically, passive progressive relaxation.

TABLE 8.1 - THE 8 STEPS OF S.O.O.T.H.I.N.G. RELAXATION

- ① **S**eek a comfortable environment.
- ② **O**ccupy the space you need.
- ③ **O**bserve your abdominal breathing.
- ④ **T**hink about relaxing your muscles.
- ⑤ **H**eighten your relaxation state by feeling warmth and heaviness in your muscles.
- ⑥ **I**magine a special place.
- ⑦ **N**ote the pleasurable aspects of being completely relaxed.
- ⑧ **G**radually come out of the state of relaxation.

There's no better time to practice than the present! Go ahead, take some time to take care of yourself and learn how to relax.

EXERCISE 8.1 - PRACTICING THE 8 STEPS OF S.O.O.T.H.I.N.G. RELAXATION

❶ Seek a comfortable environment.

Finding a comfortable place is the first thing you should do when you first attempt to do relaxation. Because this skill requires concentration and is intended to help you calm your body and mind, it is best if you choose a place where you won't be distracted by noise, people or bright lights. Your bedroom is usually a good pick. You should seek this type of environment mainly when you first start practicing relaxation. Eventually, you should practice and test your ability to relax in more stressful situations. Ultimately, you want to be able to relax any time, any place, in the presence of anyone and everyone. In other words, you want to be able to stay calm and relaxed before your gold-medal game at the Olympics.

❷ Occupy the space you need.

Once you have found a suitable environment, it's important that you put yourself into a comfortable position. Take up all the space you need. It is suggested that you lie down on your back, legs straight and slightly apart, your arms at your side not touching your body, palms up, and your eyes closed. Extending both arms and legs will help you get maximum relaxation effects. Closing your eyes will allow you to concentrate on the relaxation process rather than everything in your environment. These guidelines have been suggested by experts, however, what's important is that you try different ways and do what is most comfortable and soothing for you.

❸ Observe your abdominal breathing.

The next step is to focus on your abdominal breathing, a vital aspect of relaxation. It consists of slowly inhaling air through the nose, feeling your stomach rise, then slowly exhaling it through the mouth, feeling your stomach fall. A trick to know if you're breathing from the abdomen or your diaphragm is to put your hand on your stomach and feel if it moves up and down as you breathe. Try it for a few minutes. Listen to the sound of the air as you breathe it in and out of your lungs. Feel yourself getting more and more relaxed with each breath. Focus on inhaling pure air filled with confidence and control and exhaling all your worries, negative thoughts and tension out of your body.

❹ Think about relaxing your muscles.

While you continue breathing comfortably, relax your muscles in the following order: your toes, ankles, legs (calves, shins, quadriceps, hamstrings), buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, wrists, arms (forearm, upper), shoulders, neck, head (jaw, lips, tongue, cheeks, eyes, forehead). Individually think about each muscle and feel the tension or tightness leave your body (i.e., spend about 5-10 seconds on each muscle). Imagine that you're like cooked spaghetti: warm, soft, loose, flexible. As you scan your muscles for tension, say to yourself, "relax." Scan your body one last time after having relaxed each muscle to ensure all the tension has been removed. If the order in which you relaxed your muscles didn't appeal to you, try a different one. Just make sure you target all the large muscle groups in your body.

EXERCISE 8.1 - PRACTICING THE 8 STEPS OF S.O.O.T.H.I.N.G. RELAXATION (cont)**⑥ Heighten your relaxation state by feeling warmth and heaviness.**

After having released the tension in your muscles, feel yourself sinking deeper and deeper into a state of relaxation. Imagining your muscles getting heavier and warmer will help you relax even more. Repeat to yourself, “My legs are getting warmer and heavier, my arms are getting warmer and heavier,” etc. Think of your body sinking into the chair, bed or ground, and let it totally support you. Imagine the sun beaming on you, warming you up. Think of a bright color, like the color red, spreading through your body to heighten these feelings of warmth and relaxation. Do not confuse relaxation with sleep. Your body should be comfortable and relaxed but not sleepy.

⑦ Imagine a special place.

It is generally easier to imagine or visualize things when you're relaxed because you are calm, your focus is clear and you have no distractions. Imagining a special place you like to go to can bring about feelings of confidence, happiness, control and security. It can increase the effects of relaxation because going to this place makes you feel calm, powerful and positive. Take a few minutes to imagine a place where you feel totally comfortable, content and successful. See, hear, and feel everything in this special place. Any place is good as long as you feel at your best when you're there (*see Section 12 for more details on imagery*).

⑧ Note the pleasurable aspects of being completely relaxed.

You are moving right along here. Are you enjoying it so far? I ask this because enjoyment is an important part of relaxation. Chances are the effects will be greater if you actually enjoy what you are doing. Most people like doing relaxation because it helps them attain a sense of inner peace and an intimate mind-body connection. It allows them to become one with themselves, which is generally a very satisfying experience. Relax and let your body and mind enjoy these moments of rest and rejuvenation.

⑨ Gradually come out of the state of relaxation.

No matter how peaceful and pleasant relaxation may be, you eventually have to come back to your normal state of awareness. Because your muscles and mind are very relaxed, you should do this slowly and gradually. Take your time, don't rush things. Start by moving your fingers and toes. When you're ready, open your eyes, slowly stand up, and move around to get the blood circulating throughout your body. Remember that abdominal breathing is as important in this last step as it is in all the other ones. Take a few energizing breaths before you move on to another activity (*see Appendix A for an example of a Passive Progressive Relaxation script*).

b) Active Progressive Relaxation

Active progressive relaxation is similar to passive progressive relaxation except that it involves consciously contracting and relaxing your muscles rather than just thinking about relaxing them. The good thing about this technique is that it helps you become more aware of the difference between being tense and being relaxed, and the varying intensities at which you can voluntarily release or induce muscular tension. If you have never done relaxation before, it would be beneficial to start with this technique.

You can repeat the steps in Table 8.1, however when you get to step 4, do the following: first tense your muscles for about 5 seconds and then gradually release the tension for 10 seconds. For example, when you get to your hands and fingers, make a fist with your hands and contract/squeeze them for 5 seconds, then totally relax them for 10 seconds. Note the soothing effects associated with the absence of tension. You can experiment a little bit and vary the intensity at which you contract your muscles.

In order to do this technique properly, give yourself at least 20 minutes to completely relax all your muscle groups. If you are pressed for time, you might want to skip steps 5 and 6 (see *Appendix A for an example of an Active Progression Relaxation script*).

"Active Progressive Relaxation" is a good technique with which to start if you have never done relaxation before.

c) One breath relaxation

Breathing is a major component of relaxation. It is part of your autonomic nervous system, which means that it is done automatically unless you choose to override the system to control your breathing. As your body and mind get tense in stressful situations for example, you can turn to your breathing to relax. One breath relaxation is a technique that can help you relax quickly in a matter of seconds. You could use it during games between plays or between quarters to regain your focus and to help remove waste products resulting from intense exercise. If you utilize this technique, it is assumed that you have mastered the ability to progressively relax your muscles, and to breathe using your diaphragm (*Step 3 in Table 8.1*). One breath relaxation consists of the following steps:

- 1) Take a deep breath all the way down from your diaphragm, preferably inhaling through the nose, and count to 10.
- 2) Exhale through the mouth for about 15 seconds or until you have totally emptied your lungs, and repeat to yourself "relax," "release," "loose," or another word that produces the same effect.

If you're good at this, it should take you 30 to 40 seconds to get totally relaxed. If the effect isn't there, repeat steps 1 and 2 a few more times.

Set a goal to practice relaxation tonight before going to bed. Ten to fifteen minutes every day or every second day is all you need to become very proficient at it. If it's easier for you, use a relaxation tape or even make your own. The purpose of the following exercise is to help you create your own personal script to relax.

EXERCISE 8.2 - MY PERSONAL RELAXATION SCRIPT

Based on your knowledge of relaxation and the information in this workbook, write a script using your preferred procedure, as well as words and thoughts that are meaningful to you. Read it out loud and record it on a tape. If you don't like to listen to your voice on a tape, ask someone else to do it for you. You will find an example of a script in Appendix A. You are welcome to use it or modify it to suit your needs and preferences.

EXERCISE 8.2 - MY PERSONAL RELAXATION SCRIPT (cont)

d) Self-Hypnosis

Self-hypnosis is a powerful technique you can quickly learn to regulate your intensity and cope with stress and stress-related problems. You can use it to help yourself relax and to reinforce positive perspectives in your life.

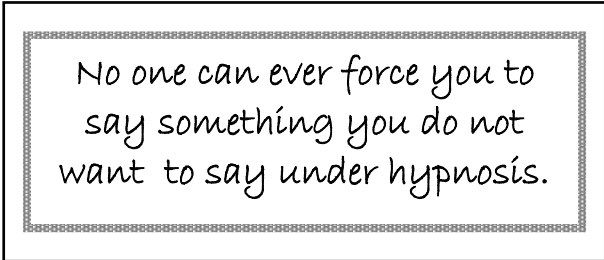
When you hypnotize yourself or get hypnotized by someone else, **you're in the driver's seat**. You are always in charge and can choose what you want to think, imagine, feel and do. Although you are very relaxed, you *never* completely lose awareness of what's going on around you. You can therefore fully respond to your environment if you chose to do so. You are in control at all times and can come out of the hypnotic state any time you want. Let's say you're at home by yourself and you have hypnotized yourself. You hear the phone ring and you want to answer it because you are expecting this call. No problem! You can simply come out of the state of hypnosis and answer the phone. When you're done, you can go back into a trance and continue where you left off.

There are many misconceptions about hypnosis. What are your thoughts on it? Have you ever tried it before? Before you attempt to hypnotize yourself, it's important that you give up any fears or apprehensions you might have about it. Let's go over some common **false** myths. It is untrue to think that when you're hypnotized you'll:

- Be tricked into doing something foolish.
- Commit an illegal or unethical act.
- Unwillingly disclose deep and disturbing secrets from your distant past.
- Divulge something you prefer not to, such as an affair or angry feelings toward another person.

Hypnosis allows you to experience your thoughts and images as real. During hypnosis, you willingly suspend disbelief for the moment, just as you do when you become absorbed in a fantasy or a daydream. For instance, when you're watching a violent chase in a movie, your mind and body respond in several ways as though you were actually participating in the chase: your muscles tense, your heart rate increases, you feel excited or scared. The same thing happens during hypnosis.

Do you know that you get hypnotized practically everyday? Often times when you're completely focused on executing a skill or a play in your sport, you enter hypnosis without even knowing it. Daydreaming is also a hypnotic state. Have you ever noticed that sometimes you're in "la-la land" and when you come out of it, you realize that 20 minutes have gone by but it only felt like 5 minutes? Hypnotic states will do that to you. You might also get hypnotized when you drive long distances, when you try to remember a sequence of events in your past, or when you experience strong emotions such as fear. So really, there's nothing new or scary about hypnosis. The following table outlines certain elements of a hypnotic trance.



No one can ever force you to say something you do not want to say under hypnosis.

TABLE 8.2 - ELEMENTS OF A HYPNOTIC TRANSE**Every hypnotic trance includes the following elements:**

- ◆ Decrease in alertness / consciousness.
- ◆ Reduction of muscular activity and energy output.
- ◆ Narrowing of attention.
- ◆ Limb catalepsy: a tendency for the arms and legs to stay in the position they are placed due to some rigidity in the muscles.
- ◆ Understanding of words at a literal level, i.e., if you were asked, "Can you tell me why you shot the ball high," you would likely reply, "Yes."
- ◆ Increased suggestibility, i.e., if you were told your arms are feeling heavy, you would likely feel a sensation of heaviness.

There are many advantages to using self-hypnosis to increase the quality of your performance and your overall sense of well-being.

Benefits of hypnosis include the ability to:

- Concentrate, learn and remember in enormous detail.
- Engage in a focused and intense mental activity while remaining relaxed and calm.
- Make posthypnotic suggestions to control pain, reduce stressful emotions and chronic fatigue, change habits, and improve sleep, coping skills and performance.
- Control organic functions such as heart rate, breathing rate, bleeding, and restoration of injured tissues.
- Produce anesthesia in any part of the body.
- Regress to relive something in the past while activating all five senses to make the physical sensations real as if the experience was actually occurring.
- Distort time in order to compress a great deal of thinking and recall into a very short period of time.

Self-hypnosis is great because every time, you go on a different voyage: you can go in the past, remain in the present, or travel to the future. Just think, you could relive a precious moment when you were three years old fishing at the cottage with your mom and dad. Once again, remember that you are always in control of where you go on these voyages.

You should follow these steps to learn how to use hypnosis:

1. Reflect on what being hypnotized means to you. You must actively and voluntarily choose to engage in self-hypnosis.
2. Learn the power of suggestion.
3. Learn the steps of self-hypnosis.

4. Learn how to write a self-induction script.
5. Learn abbreviated inductions (*optional*).

When you're ready, move to step 2. The following exercises have been included to demonstrate the power of suggestion. Try one now!

EXERCISE 8.3 - THE POWER OF SUGGESTION
<p>1. Uneven Arms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stretch both arms in front of you at shoulder level. With eyes closed, imagine that a weight is being tied to your right arm as you strive to keep it up. * Imagine a second weight, then a third and fourth one. Feel the weights pulling your arm down as it gets heavier and heavier. * Now imagine that a huge balloon filled with helium has been tied to your left arm and is pulling it up into the air. Your arm feels light as it is stretched higher and higher toward the ceiling. * Open your eyes and notice where your arms are relative to each other. <p>2. Postural Sway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stand up with your eyes closed and imagine holding a heavy suitcase in your right hand. * Imagine holding bigger and bigger suitcases that are weighing your arm down and pulling you over on your right side. * After two or three minutes, open your eyes and notice any changes in your posture. * Again, close your eyes and imagine that you are standing outside in a storm and a strong northerly wind is blowing you back on your heels. The gust is so powerful that you feel like you are going to lose your balance. * Notice if your weight is shifting in response to your imagination.

Most people who try these exercises observe that their bodies move at least a little bit as a result of their self-suggestions. If that wasn't the case for you, practice the exercises a few more times. If you still don't notice any movement after this, hypnosis might not be for you. If you conclude that you are a good candidate for self-hypnosis, proceed to step 3. The following table provides you with guidelines to induce yourself into a hypnotic trance. You can adapt and modify these suggestions to suit your personal style and goals.

TABLE 8.3 - 10 STEPS FOR A PERSONALIZED SELF-INDUCTION
<p>Here are suggestions to induce yourself into a trance. Set aside enough time to do the exercise without being interrupted (i.e., at least 20 minutes to enter and deepen the hypnotic state). Don't worry about success or how you're doing. It will get easier with practice.</p> <p>1. Position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, sit in a comfortable chair with a high back and support for your arms, hands, neck and head. • Position your feet flat on the floor with your legs and arms uncrossed. • Loosen any tight clothing. • You might want to remove your glasses or contact lenses.

TABLE 8.3 - 10 STEPS FOR A PERSONALIZED SELF-INDUCTION (cont)

2. Key word or phrase

- Choose a word or a phrase that will help you counteract your problem or concern. For example, if your problem is anxiety before games, your key phrase could be “Calm and clear.” You could also use your favorite color, sound, or location.
- As you focus on a point in front of you, repeat this word or phrase to yourself slowly until your eyes close. Use it enough times during your inductions so that it becomes associated with a feeling of being comfortable, relaxed and at peace.
- With enough practice, this key word or phrase will be sufficient to quickly induce hypnosis.

3. Breathing

- After your eyes close, take several deep breaths from your abdomen, just like you learned in the previous relaxation exercise (see exercise 8.1). Feel yourself getting more at ease and at peace each time you exhale.

4. Muscle relaxation

- Scan your body for any tension in your muscles and free yourself from it. Let go of any stiffness you may have. The key is not to fall asleep here, you just want to make sure you are comfortable and loose.

5. Staircase to a special place

- Imagine a staircase going down to your special place (see exercise 8.1).
- Count backwards from ten to zero as you go down the steps. Each number can be associated with one step. Take your time. Feel yourself getting more and more calm and peaceful with each step.

6. Your special place

- If you completed exercise 8.1, you will have already identified a special place. You may go to a different one if you wish. It might be helpful for you to practice imagining this special place before you induce yourself. Use all of your senses in building the scene. For example, if you’re lying on a beach, feel the warmth of the sun beaming on your body, smell the salty and misty air, hear the waves crashing on the shore and the seagulls above you, taste the salt on your lips, and feel the soft sand tickling your fingers and toes.

7. Deepening hypnosis

- Repeat to yourself the following suggestions over and over again in varying orders and combinations until you feel a deep sense of calm, peacefulness, and a sense of “letting go.”

*Drifting deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper.
 Feeling more and more peaceful and calm.
 Drifting and drowsy, drowsy and drifting.
 Sinking down, down, down into a completely relaxed state.*

TABLE 8.3 - 10 STEPS FOR A PERSONALIZED SELF-INDUCTION (cont)

8. Enjoying hypnosis

- Once you have tried hypnosis a couple of times, you will realize that it is a wonderful state in which to be. Take some time to enjoy this state and to take pleasure from your special place that brings you comfort, peacefulness and confidence.

9. Post-hypnotic suggestions

- Once you have spent some time in your special place, you might want to give yourself post-hypnotic suggestions to cope with and/or eliminate your concern or problem. Repeat these suggestions until they begin to take hold. See Table 8.4 for guidelines on how to create your own post-hypnotic suggestions.

10. Coming out of hypnosis

- When you are ready to come back to your normal state of awareness, repeat step 5 in this table, except imagine yourself going up the stairs and count forward from one to ten. As you move up each step, tell yourself that you are becoming more and more alert and refreshed. When you reach number nine, tell yourself to open your eyes. When you get to 10, tell yourself that you are alert and wide awake. Once again, take your time to do this.

Hypnotic Suggestions

Learning to give yourself appropriate and positive suggestions is an important step in self-hypnosis (*Step 9 in Table 8.3*). In a nutshell, self-hypnosis is an experience of your own thoughts and images and that's why it can be extremely beneficial. Your thoughts and images influence your hypnotic experience because when you're in this state, your subconscious mind is opened to suggestions and is ready to believe what you tell it. This is why you must carefully choose the words, images and thoughts you want to evoke under hypnosis. Here are guidelines to keep in mind when you create suggestions for yourself.

TABLE 8.4 - GUIDELINES FOR CREATING POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS

Post-hypnotic suggestions should be:

1. Direct: i.e., "I will be calm, confident, and in control."
2. Positive: i.e., "I will feel energized to train," rather than "I won't feel tired to train."
3. Made for the immediate future, not the present: i.e., "Tomorrow, my shoulder will feel more healthy and strong," or "Soon, I will be able to make long and accurate passes."
4. Permissive and/or firm: i.e., "I **can** feel relaxed during the game" (permissive) or "I **will** feel relaxed during the game" (firm). Experiment to see if you respond better to permissive or more controlling suggestions. Never include the word "try" because it implies doubt and the possibility of failure.
5. Repeated at least three times in your script (*see Exercise 8.4*).

TABLE 8.4 - GUIDELINES FOR CREATING POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS (cont)

6. Attached to a visual image: i.e., if you are trying to overcome a feeling of fatigue, imagine yourself bouncing in the pool with springs on your feet and see yourself looking refreshed and healthy.
7. Attached to an emotion: i.e., if you are attempting to improve your self-confidence during games, imagine feeling extremely happy and good about yourself after scoring a goal when you were behind in the last quarter.
8. Written in advance and then summarized into catchy words or phrases that are easily remembered.

Here are examples of post-hypnotic phrases that you could incorporate into your personal script to overcome the following potential concerns / problems.

Chronic fatigue

a) I can wake up refreshed and rested; b) I can pace myself through training so I can be productive; c) Whenever I feel flat during a game, I will imagine my blood flowing through my veins and arteries and feeding all my muscles to get them energized.

Injury / illness

a) I can imagine a white light at the top of my head. I can see it surrounding my entire body. I can feel it begin to move within my body, cleansing and healing it as it slowly spreads throughout it; b) I can feel more and more healthy and strong; c) Each time I relax, my knee will become stronger; d) After I do my rehab exercises, it will feel better and be more flexible [visualize yourself being healthy, strong, and successful while performing sport skills]; e) I will rest and eat well in order to stay healthy throughout the season.

Minor chronic head or back pain

a) Soon my head will be cool and relaxed [imagine cool images]; b) Gradually, I will feel the muscles in my neck and back loosen up. In an hour, they will be completely relaxed; c) Whenever the pain comes back, I will simply turn my ring a quarter of a turn to the right and the pain will leave my body.

Anger or guilt

a) I can turn off my anger anytime because I'm in control and I'm the one who turned it on [see yourself turning down the volume button on your stereo system as you repeat this suggestion to yourself]; b) When I feel guilty for missing a shot during a game, I will channel this energy positively into my next play.

Self-criticism and fear of making mistakes

a) I will say positive things to myself even when I play poorly; b) If I make a mistake during practice, I will learn from it and keep going; c) When I find myself being self-critical, I will do one breath relaxation and shift my thoughts to positive ones.

Low self-esteem / confidence

a) Each day, I will feel more and more able to perform during games; b) I can do it; c) I will feel myself get better and more fulfilled after each practice; d) I will like myself more and more; e) I will be a smart, talented and creative player.

Lack of motivation

a) *When I get up in the morning, I will have the energy and desire to achieve my goals;* b) *I will have the power to change myself;* c) *I can see myself solving my problems and getting beyond them [imagine hiking up a challenging mountain and reaching the top];* d) *I can prioritize what I need to do next week and take it one day at a time;* e) *I will focus on one goal next practice;* f) *As I get ready for the tournament, I will get more and more interested in it;* g) *When I finish this, I will feel great;* h) *When I achieve my goal, I will reward myself by going out for a nice dinner with my partner;* i) *Tomorrow, I deserve to succeed.*

Feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness in the presence of big crowds

a) *The next time I play, I will feel confident and secure;* b) *I can relax and enjoy the thought that there will be people at the game who will be there to support me because they see me as a good friend and a good athlete;* c) *I can take the energy from a big crowd and use it to stay focused and intense throughout the game;* d) *Whenever I lace my fingers together, I will feel confidence flow throughout my entire body.*

Anxiety about an upcoming game

a) *I can apply what I have learned in practice to play well next game;* b) *I will enjoy performing;* c) *I feel confident that I will remember what I need to do during the game;* d) *Whenever I feel nervous, I will remember to breathe deeply and say to myself, "Calm and in control;"* e) *My mind can become more and more calm and sharp;* f) *I can imagine myself playing at my best from the beginning to the end of the game;* g) *I can be relaxed in response to stressful situations [imagine yourself maintaining your focus and cool in the face of specific fears and distractions].*

Pain or muscle tension

a) *I can see my pain as a piece of dry ice burning and stabbing me. I see the sun shining and feel it warming up my shoulders and beaming down on my entire body. The piece of ice is steaming, melting away into a puddle and I can feel my pain starting to flow. As it flows, it turns into a warm, orange fluid moving through my body toward my right shoulder, filling up the joint, going down my arm, into my forearm, my wrist and right to the tip of my fingers. When I'm ready, I can totally let go of it. I can shake my hand and feel the pain leave my fingers and my entire body;* b) *My muscles will be free of any unwanted tension;* c) *I will feel loose and in control during the game;* d) *I can be totally relaxed whenever I want.*

EXERCISE 8.4 - PERSONAL POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS	
<p>Practice writing your own suggestions to overcome particular concerns/problems you are experiencing not only in your sport but also in other areas of your life. Refer to the guidelines provided in Table 8.4 and the examples above. First clearly define your concern/problem, then state your goal(s) in the form of positive suggestions. Before you even try to resolve it using hypnosis, identify and eliminate any possible external factors that may be contributing to your problem (i.e., you can't sleep the night before a game but you drink a lot of caffeine during the day).</p>	
<p>Concerns / Problems in my <u>sport</u></p>	<p>Post-Hypnotic Suggestions</p>

EXERCISE 8.4 - PERSONAL POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS (cont)

**Concerns / Problems in my
sport**

Post-Hypnotic Suggestions

Writing a Self-Hypnosis Script

Now that you are familiar with the steps to induce a hypnotic state, and you have written personal suggestions for dealing with specific concerns in your life and sport, you can write a personal script. After this, you can tape record your script so you can listen to it when you induce yourself. A script has been provided in Appendix B. You can leave it as is if it appeals to you, or re-write it in the space provided below to suit your needs and preferences.

EXERCISE 8.5 - MY PERSONAL SELF-HYPNOSIS SCRIPT

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Recording the Script

When you are ready to record the script, speak in the following manner in order to help your mind drift and remain open to suggestions:

- Read it aloud and speak using the same tone (no inflection in your voice).
- Keep the tempo slow and monotonous.
- Pronounce one word after another with an even beat.
- Pause between each sentence.

Abbreviated Self-Inductions

Once you have practiced inducing yourself into a hypnotic state and you are comfortable with the steps that were outlined previously, you might want to try abbreviated inductions. These are short techniques that can get you in a trance within minutes. Following are some examples.

Eye fixation: Fix your eyes on a point slightly above your line of vision. Let your peripheral vision narrow and your eyes lose focus. Allow your eyes to water. Let them close and feel drowsy. To increase the drowsiness, roll your eyes up to the top of your head two to three times.

Pendulum drop: To make a pendulum, tie an object such as a paper clip, pen, or ring at the end of a heavy thread 10 inches long. Hold the pendulum in eye view with your dominant hand and follow it with your eyes as it dangles from side to side. Let your eyes close naturally. Once your eyes are closed, picture a candle flame, focus on it and feel yourself sink deeper and deeper into an altered state of consciousness. Tell yourself that when you have entered hypnosis, your hand will relax and drop the pendulum. Count slowly from ten to zero.

Key word / phrase: Breathe deeply and slowly and repeat the key word or phrase you have been using during your initial inductions. As you say the word or phrase, close your eyes and enter hypnosis.

Coin flip: Place a coin in the palm of your hand. Suggest to yourself that your hand will gradually begin to turn over. Allow your hand to turn slowly until the coin falls out. As the coin leaves your hand, close your eyes and enter hypnosis.

Start practicing self-hypnosis. There's nothing like it! Significant effects can be achieved within two days. If you want to master the skill, practice it twice a day for a week or once a day for two weeks. Remember the following special considerations:

- Do not practice inducing yourself in a car or in any other situation where your safety requires that you be fully alert and capable to respond quickly to your environment. After an induction, make sure that you are fully alert and awake before driving a car.
- If you have a tendency to fall asleep during hypnosis, shorten the inductions so that you are awake to hear your suggestions on tape. You can also use a timer if you have to be somewhere at a certain time. Keep in mind that sometimes you might think that you are asleep during the trance but in reality, you are still able to hear and benefit from your positive suggestions.
- You might find that as your concern, problem, or symptom appears to resolve itself, you lose your motivation to continue practicing self-hypnosis. Don't worry, this is normal. If the concern presents itself again at a later time, go back to self-hypnosis.

At this point, it might be helpful to determine 1) when it would be appropriate for you to relax and 2) the method that would be most beneficial to you, given the various situations in which you find yourself in your sport, and the constraints with which you must deal. The following exercise will help you to develop a plan to incorporate active and passive progressive relaxation, one breath relaxation, as well as self-hypnosis, in your preparation for training and competition.

EXERCISE 8.6 - DETERMINING POTENTIAL USES OF RELAXATION IN YOUR SPORT	
<p>Identify situations in your sport in which you can apply relaxation techniques. Be specific with the timing and type of relaxation you want to perform and determine whether it would be more appropriate to do active progressive relaxation (APR), passive progressive relaxation (PPR), one breath relaxation (OBR), self-hypnosis (SH), or any other type of relaxation from which you could benefit.</p>	
Situation	Type of Relaxation
<i>Examples related to competitions:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Night before a competition (around 8:00 PM) • Before penalty shot during game • Morning of a competition to release tension related to an injury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ APR or SH ⇒ OBR ⇒ PPR or SH
<i>Examples related to training:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One hour after training, particularly if really fatigued • After missing a shot on goal during a drill to regain focus • After receiving unpleasant feedback from a coach or teammate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ PPR or SH ⇒ OBR ⇒ OBR

TABLE 8.5 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Practice relaxation on a regular basis to feel calm and loose when you engage in your sport.
2. If you have never done relaxation before, start by doing “Active Progressive Relaxation,” which consists of tensing and relaxing your muscles consecutively. This will increase your awareness of what it is to be extremely tense, and conversely, completely relaxed.
3. You can also use “Passive Progressive Relaxation” (SOOTHING Relaxation) to rid your body and mind of unnecessary tension.
4. Practice using “One Breath Relaxation” in order to be able to relax instantly. This technique can be extremely useful during demanding and stressful situations.
5. Master the art of abdominal breathing. It is an important part of relaxation and can make a significant difference in its level of effectiveness.
6. Use self-hypnosis to increase your ability to relax, focus, relieve yourself of pain, stress, and fatigue, and also to enhance your sport performance. Write your own suggestions and script to make the process more meaningful.

Appendix A - Relaxation Script

Before you begin your journey, find a quiet comfortable place, and give yourself permission to spend fifteen or twenty minutes taking care of yourself. Lie down, or sit with your back and neck completely supported. Allow your chair, bed, or wherever you are, to hold you. Allow yourself to relax... Bring all your attention into your inner self and feel your body let go as you begin to shut out the outside world.

Now focus your attention on your breathing... Take a deep breath in through your nose, all the way down from your diaphragm. Feel your diaphragm moving down toward your feet... and your lower abdomen beginning to expand... As you exhale through your mouth, feel the tension flow out of your body. Inhale [count to 4]... Exhale [count to 4]... Inhale [count to 4]... Exhale [count to 4]... For the next few minutes, breathe easily and slowly... With each breath, think to yourself, "Relax."

[You can replace the following portion with a script for passive or active progressive relaxation]

a) Passive Progressive Relaxation (PPR)

Take a mental journey through your body, beginning at the bottom of your feet. With the next breath in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." As you breathe out, say to yourself, "...warmth and heaviness into my feet." With the next breath in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." With the next breath out, say to yourself, "...warmth and heaviness into my legs." Completely relax your feet and legs... Breathe in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." Breathe out, think "...warmth and heaviness into my buttocks." Feel it sinking underneath you. Totally relaxed... With the next breath in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." With the next breath out, say to yourself, "...warmth and heaviness into my abdomen." Feel yourself sinking deeper and deeper into a wonderful state of relaxation. Take another breath in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." Exhale and say to yourself, "...warmth and heaviness into my chest." Feel the tension leaving your chest and the rest of your body. Breathe in and hear yourself saying, deep inside yourself... "I am breathing..." Breathe out and feel the warmth and heaviness move into your back... slowly moving up your spine... giving you a tingling sensation... Sinking deeper and deeper, feeling totally at peace with yourself. Take another breath in, say to yourself, "I am breathing..." Breathe out, say to yourself, "...warmth and heaviness into my fingers." Feel the tingling sensation at the tip of your fingers... allow yourself to let go of any tension... Breathe in, hear yourself say, "I am breathing..." Deep breath out... Feel warmth and heaviness into your arms... Feel it spread to your shoulders... and your neck... Breathe in and say to yourself, "I am breathing..." As you breathe out, let go of your jaw and allow your lips to part slightly... completely relax your mouth and jaw. Enjoy the sensation of letting go... of drifting off into a peaceful state of relaxation... Feel the warmth and heaviness spreading into your cheeks... gently pressing against your face... Now feel your eyes get completely relaxed... your forehead... your entire face is feeling warm... heavy... and relaxed... Breathe peacefully... Your mind has just moved through your body, connecting with it, giving it attention, soothing the tense, tired places.

Now, do one last final scan to completely relax all of your muscles... Your feet are relaxed... Your legs are relaxed... Your buttocks are relaxed... Your back is relaxed... Your stomach is relaxed, your chest is relaxed... your fingers, hands, and arms are relaxed... Your shoulders are relaxed... Your neck is relaxed... Your jaw, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, and forehead are completely relaxed... Your body is deeply and fully relaxed.

b) Active Progressive Relaxation (APR)

Take a mental journey through your body, beginning at the bottom of your feet. Contract your toes by pulling them back... try to touch the top of your leg as you curl back your toes... Hold it there for 5 seconds... Now, totally let go... Let your feet completely relax... [count 10 seconds] Notice the difference between being tense and being completely relaxed.

Now contract your legs... Tighten your calves, thighs and hamstrings by pressing your heels into the ground and extending them... Hold it... Hold it a bit longer... [count 5 seconds] Now, completely let go of the tension. Let your legs totally relax. [count 10 seconds]

Shift your attention to your buttocks. Squeeze them as tight as you can... Feel how tense your buttocks are. [count 5 seconds] Now relax... [count 10 seconds]

Tense your back now. Shift your shoulders back into the floor to really feel the tension. Contract... Contract... [count 5 seconds]. Now let go... Notice how good it feels to be loose and calm... [count 10 seconds]

Move to your stomach and chest... Contract your abs as tight as you can... Feel the tension move up into your chest... [count 5 seconds] Squeeze... Squeeze... Let go... completely relax your stomach and chest for a good 10 seconds.

Now make a fist with your hands. Feel the tension and power building up... [count 5 seconds] Relax... Let the tension leave the tip of your fingers... [count 10 seconds]

Tighten your forearms by making a fist and curling it upward toward the ceiling... Hold it... [count 5 seconds] Relax... Enjoy this peaceful sensation... [count 10 seconds]

Bring your attention to your upper arms... contract your biceps by flexing them and making a fist... [count 5 seconds] Now, let go... Let your arms and hands completely relax... [count 10 seconds]

Shrug your shoulders and pay attention to the feeling of tension... [count 5 seconds] Relax and let your shoulders drop. Allow the tension to dissolve and disappear... [count 10 seconds]

Incline your head to the right and feel the stretch on the left side of your neck... Hold it... [count 5 seconds] Release and shift your head back to the center. Now move your head to the left side... Feel the tension rise on the right side of your neck... Hold it there... [count 5 seconds] Let go... Enjoy the feeling of having stretched and relaxed your neck... [count 10 seconds]

Now clench your jaw... squeeze your teeth together as tight as you can... [count 5 seconds] Release and let go of the tension... Allow your lips to part slightly... Let your tongue fall and relax... [count 10 seconds]

Squeeze your eyes as tight as you can... Feel the tension building around your eyes... [count 5 seconds] Now relax them... Let the muscles around your eyes completely relax... [count 10 seconds]

Shift your attention to your forehead... Wrinkle it as tight as you can... Feel the tension in your eyebrows... [count 5 seconds] Relax, let go of all the tension... [count 10 seconds]

Now, do one last final scan of your body to completely relax all of your muscles... Your feet are relaxed... Your legs are relaxed... Your buttocks are relaxed... Your back is relaxed... Your stomach is relaxed, your chest is relaxed... your fingers, hands, and arms are relaxed... Your shoulders are relaxed... Your neck is relaxed... Your jaw, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, and forehead are completely relaxed... Your body is deeply and fully relaxed.

[Going to your special place is optional – include after PPR or APR]

Now let your mind wander to your special place... a place deep within... where it is peaceful and calm... quiet and comfortable... Enjoy every aspect of it... See the shapes and colors of your special place. Look around... see the beautiful patterns of colors. Hear the sounds in your special place. Notice how these sounds are music to your ears... how they form an invigorating melody that sends vibrating energy throughout your body... you feel revitalized in your special place. Enjoy it... let yourself be absorbed by it. Notice the wonderful odors... they are so appeasing that they make the hair in your nostrils dance. Smell your special place... let the fragrances refresh you... let them stimulate thoughts, emotions, and actions that you might have forgotten for a while. Feel everything in your special place... Feel how confident you are... totally confident and fulfilled... totally safe and calm... in your special place.

[Leave a minute or two of blank tape to drift off into your special place]

When you are ready, gradually come out of your relaxed state... Each time you breathe in, feel the oxygen begin to fill you with energy... You are feeling more and more energized, yet you remain comfortable and calm... Move your fingers and toes slowly... your arms and legs... roll your head from side to side... stretch out... and open your eyes.

Appendix B – Self-Hypnosis Script

Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed. Let your eyes focus gently on a point in front of you... and take a deep breath all the way down from your abdomen. Take another slow deep relaxing breath and feel the air flowing in and out. Feel a sense of peacefulness spread throughout your body. See an oxygen molecule enter your nostrils... see it go down your pharynx and then your trachea. See it go down your left primary bronchi... then your secondary and tertiary bronchi... to finally reach a bronchiole. Shift your thoughts so that now you see it transformed... and being liberated from your mouth. Even though your eyes are getting tired, keep them opened a little longer and take another deep breath... and another. Your eyes are becoming heavier and heavier... let them close, as you say to yourself...

[Insert your key word or phrase here]

Now relax your muscles. Scan your body from head to toe to see if there is any unwanted tension or stiffness. Let it go... all of it. See it leave your body... through your fingers, your toes, your mouth. You are feeling more and more comfortable and at peace with yourself. As you are getting increasingly relaxed, your muscles feel heavier and heavier... The feeling of the tension leaving your body is replaced by a feeling of heaviness. You can feel the gravity pulling you down into your chair... your limbs... your muscles feel very heavy. Do one last check to make sure your entire body is loose, comfortable and relaxed... Feel yourself drifting deeper and deeper... deeper and deeper... becoming more and more drowsy, peaceful, and calm. Drifting and drowsy... drowsy and drifting... drifting down, down, down... deeper, deeper, and deeper.

Now it's time to go to your special place... a place where you feel safe... happy... confident... and in control. You can take the stairway down to your special place... and with each step, you can count backwards from ten to zero. With each step, feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, at peace, and in tune with your inner self. In ten steps you will be there... feeling peaceful and safe as you get closer to your special place. Ten... nine... eight... seven... six... five... four... three... two... one... zero.

[You can repeat this countdown two or three times
if you want to deepen your hypnotic state]

Now that you are there, see the shapes and colors of your special place. Look around... see how the colors are interspersed unevenly. Now notice how they mesh together to make this scene the most beautiful one you have ever seen. Hear the sounds surrounding you in your special place. Let your ears capture the obvious ones... as well as the faint ones in the distance. Notice how these sounds are music to your ears... how they form an invigorating melody that sends vibrating energy throughout your body... you feel revitalized in your special place. Enjoy it... let yourself be absorbed by it. Notice the wonderful odors... they are so appealing that they make the hair in your nostrils dance. Smell your special place... let the fragrances refresh you... let them stimulate thoughts, emotions, and actions that have been overlooked for a while. Feel everything in your special place... Feel how confident you are... totally confident and fulfilled... totally safe and calm... in your special place.

Feel yourself drifting deeper and deeper... deeper and deeper... more and more drowsy, peaceful, and calm. You feel drowsy and drifting... drifting and drowsy, drifting down, down, down... deeper, deeper, and deeper... so peaceful.

[Pause and spend time in your special place]

Now you know that you can...

[Add any hypnotic suggestions for the future.
Repeat the suggestions at least three times.]

Now, when you are ready, come back up... come all the way back feeling alert, refreshed, and wide awake. You can start to come up the stairs now. One... two... three... four... more and more alert and awake... five... six... seven... more and more alert and awake... eight... nine... beginning to open your eyes... and ten... completely alert, refreshed, and wide awake. Alert, refreshed, and wide awake.