

# PERFORM

## MENTAL HEALTH FOR TEEN ATHLETES

Tips from a psychologist specializing in sports and a baseball coach with a master's in sport science



### Show Up For **YOURSELF**

**People usually assume you're fine. If you are not OK, be your own advocate and speak up about what is going on in your body and mind.**

- ➔ Don't push through pain just to look strong or prove something.
- ➔ Pushing hard all the time can lead to perfectionism and burnout. Give your best — but not everything.
- ➔ Speaking of perfectionism ... let go of the expectation that perfect is attainable. Nobody's perfect. Not you, not coach, not pro athletes.



### KEEP BUILDING YOUR MENTAL GAME

**Here are more ways to build mental strength and lead with confidence.**

- 🎯 Set goals that grow with you. For example, in weightlifting, instead of trying to lift more than your teammate, focus on lifting more than you did last week.
- 🎯 You don't have to be the star player to lead. Step up by encouraging teammates, showing up on time, and working consistently.
- 🎯 There is more great info online to help you manage your mindset — just double-check it. Ask where it's coming from and whether it can be backed up.

### **POWER** Mindset Moves

These techniques work to help you manage pressure.

- ➔ **Try 4-7-8 breathing to settle your nerves:** Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 7, breathe out for 8.

- ➔ **How you talk to yourself matters.** Hype yourself up with affirmations like "I've got this" or "I gave my best." And if you wouldn't say it to a teammate, definitely don't say it to yourself.

- ➔ **Instead of comparing yourself to others, compete with yourself.** Aim to be just a little better than you were yesterday.



### **BOUNCE BACK** After a Tough Loss

**Loss is part of sports. And it stings. The goal isn't to sugarcoat it, but to grow from it.**

- ✳ Be honest about what happened. What did the other team do better? What could you do better next time?
- ✳ Your brain focuses on what went wrong. Use that. Let it fuel smarter choices and better preparation.
- ✳ One mistake or loss doesn't define you. Take a breath and lock in on what's next.



## Burnout Builds **SLOWLY**

The good news is you can catch it early and turn it around.

- ➔ Feeling bored with your sport is a burnout warning sign. Hitting a plateau — where you're working hard but not improving — is another common signal.
- ➔ The message that you have to grind through burnout is wrong. Recovery usually means stepping back — maybe taking a day off, going easy on yourself in practice, or shortening a run.
- ➔ Even pros need a reset. You're not weak for needing rest. You're smart for catching it early.

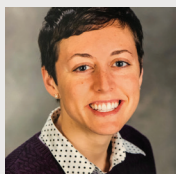
## Plan to Pull Back, **EVENTUALLY**

Leaving a sport is a big deal that every athlete faces eventually, and it deserves more attention than it gets.

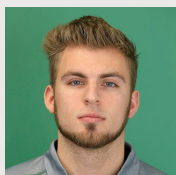


- ➔ *Stepping away from sport might happen as you're starting college — or as you're graduating — adding one big life change on top of another. Give yourself compassion.*
- ➔ *You've likely been an athlete most of your life. It's going to feel weird or sad to stop.*
- ➔ *Check in on your Big 4: your mental health, social support, exercise routine, and nutrition. What will movement look like without practice? How will you fuel your body? Who's your support system? Make a plan to stay grounded and healthy.*

## Meet the Experts



**Kristiana Feeser, Ph.D.** is an assistant professor of sports science at Russell Sage College and an applied psychologist with expertise in mental health for student-athletes. She is a former NCAA Division I swimmer.



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