

# Anxiety Disorders

## What Student-Athletes Should Know

Experiencing stress and worry can be common emotional reactions to life events, but persistent and intense worry that impairs academic or athletic performance or relationships may be an anxiety disorder.

### WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are a category of mental health conditions characterized by persistent worry or fear that is hard to control and interferes with daily life, impacting your focus, training and sleep.

Examples of anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** is characterized by ongoing, excessive worry about everyday things.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder** occurs when there is an intense fear of being embarrassed, judged negatively or rejected in social situations, or performing in front of others.
- **Panic Disorder** occurs when there are recurrent, unexpected panic attacks, which can lead to fear of another attack or significant efforts to avoid one.
- **Phobias** are characterized as a strong fear of specific things or situations (such as flying or heights) that leads to avoidance whenever possible.

**1 in 3**  
student-athletes  
report experiencing  
overwhelming  
anxiety.

### Recognizing the Signs

Changes in behavior, attitudes and academic or athletic performance may be signs of anxiety disorders. Other behavioral or physical signs may also be present.



#### Mental or Behavioral Signs

- Overthinking, difficulty focusing, negative self-talk, excessive worry about mistakes or replaying past performances.
- Irritability, tearfulness, avoidance of social performance situations or sudden withdrawal from teammates.
- Increased substance use, overtraining or excessive social media use.



#### Physical or Somatic Signs

- Restlessness, muscle tension, frequent headaches, sleep problems, fatigue or stomach pain.



#### Academic or Athletic

- Racing heart, shortness of breath, chest tightness or dizziness.

### What To Do

You or a teammate may be experiencing anxiety but are uncomfortable talking about it. You are not alone and support is available.

- Use grounding or breathing techniques to calm your mind and body, such as deep/box breathing or naming things you see around you.
- Talk to a teammate, friend, family member, coach or other trusted adult.
- If you think a teammate needs help, reach out, listen empathetically and encourage them to seek help.
- A licensed mental health provider can explain treatment options privately and confidentially.
- Connect with a licensed mental health provider or team physician who can explain treatment options privately and confidentially.

#### Box Breathing

- Exhale for a count of four.
- Hold for a count of four.
- Inhale for a count of four.
- Pause with lungs full for a count of four.
- Repeat (if you can) for four rounds.

**Remember: Seeking support is a sign of strength and help is available.**

**If you or someone you know is in crisis, call, text or chat 988.**



**For resources and guidance on mental health education, check out the [NCAA Mental Health Best Practices](#).**

