

## **Dealing with Anxiety**

We don't always have to resort to "mental" techniques to help us with our game. Sometimes applying simple processes can help us. Anxiety can come into this bracket.

Anxiety is something that most golfers experience from time to time. Try the following, the next time you find yourself being anxious before or during a round: -

## **Ways of dealing with Performance Anxiety Before the round:**

Should you find yourself getting uptight about the round try some of the following techniques to help you relax and get over your anxiety. Remember – anxiety is all in your mind!

- Arrive at the course with plenty of time so you aren't rushed. Running around two minutes before your tee time will only increase your stress levels.
- Make sure you have everything you need; equipment, balls, clothing etc.
- Taking time to check your clubs, scraping out dirt from the grooves, making sure the irons are in their allocated place in the bag can be built in to routine that sends signals to your brain that will get it into the correct mode for playing.
- If you have the facilities to practice before you tee off, make sure you use it only as a warm up. Do not work on faults and fixes half an hour before you play. Just loosen up. Nothing else.
- Head to the tee in plenty of time.

### **As you go to the tee:**

- Understand that your pre-round nerves are normal and accept them, especially during important events.
- Don't fight the adrenalin or nervous energy you feel, this is not fear, it's anticipation. Acknowledge it but don't focus on it. Once you begin playing the feeling will subside.
- Take out a couple of irons and swing gently to loosen up. The additional weight will help stretch those muscles, preparing them for play.
- Eventually take out the club you will use on the first tee (Driver, 3 Wood, whatever) and swing it freely, getting into the groove, the tempo that suits you.
- Allow yourself a few minutes to visualize\* yourself doing everything right. From a dissociated\* point of view, see your playing partners teeing off and their balls hitting the fairway. Then see yourself standing on the tee, performing your pre-shot routine and sweeping the ball away, successfully down the fairway.
- Breathe deeply and easily, close your eyes and now visualise yourself on the tee from an associated\* point of view. Feel your stance, the club in your hands, the position of the ball. Feel yourself swinging the club freely, rhythmically and with ease and watch the ball split the fairway.

### **On the tee**

- As you tee the ball up, breathe deeply and easily. Take a smooth practice swing as you pick out your target line.
- Address the ball and once more see yourself in the mental movie hitting the perfect shot.
- When you are ready, relax, let the tension go and swing.

Applying all or some of these techniques will help calm Performance anxiety leading up to a round.

## **Ways of dealing with Performance Anxiety During the round:**

Should Performance Anxiety raise its head during play, perhaps due to a couple of bad holes or even bad shots, try the following strategies to help you regain composure and confidence:

- Focus on the process\* of shot making rather than the outcome\*. Use your pre-shot routines\*, visualisation\* and relaxation\* techniques to ensure that your focus is on the "process" of playing golf, not the score or performance.
- Stay present and "in the moment" and avoid thinking too far into the round or thinking about your score at the end. The most important thing at present that needs your attention is the shot you are about to take, not your score at the end. That will take care of itself if you take care of the process of shot making.
- If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts or engage in negative self-talk, stop and focus only on your breathing. Focusing on your breathing and rhythm will automatically pull you back into the present, regain focus and begin working on the process.
- If you hit a bad shot, remember 1 bad shot doesn't make a bad round. Don't throw the club away or throw a tantrum. Don't send reinforcement signals to the brain that will make it remember the mistake. "Play" the shot again. Swing the club and visualize and feel the shot going right this time. It's about the process and keeping your mind relaxed and focused. Keep you breathing steady and calm.

## **Ways of dealing with Anxiety after the round:**

If you feel anxious or down after the round or even if you feel elated, review the following suggestions to either dismiss the negative feelings (remove their power) or reinforce and strengthen what went right so it will become easier to draw on it in the future :

- Review the round and recall the things you did well.
- Focus on the actions, thoughts and behaviours that helped you when you played well. This is a form of mental rehearsal where you practice skills that will be used during your next round.
- Acknowledge, but quickly dismiss things that went wrong. Focusing on negative aspects of your game will not help you improve.
- Create anchors\* that will help you activate and restore your confidence when you require it.

So in order to tackle Performance Anxiety it's important that you identify what you're anxious about. Know your own triggers. Remember that stress is all in the mind, so depending on what's going through your mind, use breathing and relaxation techniques or visualisation and reframing to help you focus and reduce the stress.

Try to interpret the anxious signals constructively. View the feelings as almost a prerequisite to a good performance. It shows a sign that the event matters to you - focus and view the feelings as positive rather than negative.

Use relaxation techniques to relieve tension and keep the rhythm that you require to perform well.

Use "positive self-talk" to help you focus on the process and remain in the present.

Trust and rely on your pre-performance and pre-shot routines. By performing actions that are well rehearsed and understood, the anxiety will be under control.

\* These phrases and concepts are fully explained in the Inner Golf Coach Audio Program.