winning from within

STRATEGIES AND TIPS FOR ATHLETES

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Visit the Athlete Zone

YOUR SPACE FOR RECOVERY AND RECONNECTION

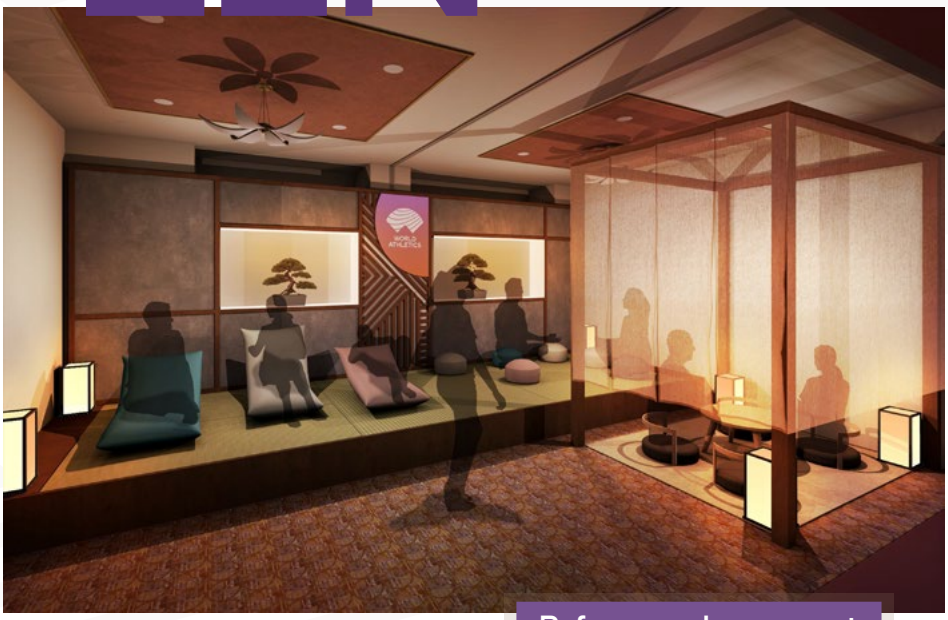
The Athlete Zone, located at the **Shinagawa Prince Hotel**, is **open daily from 10:00am to 10:00pm throughout the Championships**. This dedicated area is exclusively available to accredited athletes and offers two unique wellness spaces: Yui and Zen.

YUI

Energise and inspire

Step into Yui to recharge your energy. This vibrant space is designed to refresh and inspire athletes through a selection of traditional Japanese cultural activities. Whether you're looking for a creative reset or simply a boost between events, Yui is a place to reawaken your senses.

ZEN



Refocus and reconnect

Zen is your quiet retreat for mindfulness and calm. Here, you can slow down, breathe deeply, and find focus through relaxation and meditation. It's the ideal space to mentally reset and reconnect with yourself before or after competition.

ATHLETE WELL-BEING IS AT THE HEART OF HIGH PERFORMANCE.

The ability to train, compete, and recover effectively hinges on how well athletes care for themselves, both on and off the field of play.

During the championships, we want every athlete to feel empowered to prioritise their well-being. Whether preparing for a personal best, navigating a challenging moment, or simply managing day-to-day demands, support is essential.

That's why World Athletics has developed a number of resources dedicated to athlete health, safety, and support. These tools are designed not just to enhance performance, but to foster long-term wellbeing in sport and life.

Four ways to regulate performance anxiety

1 SLOW DOWN

In high-pressure moments –like stepping onto the track or preparing for a crucial throw or jump – it's common for anxiety to make athletes rush. This can result in false starts, technical errors, or disrupted rhythm.

Establishing consistent pre-performance routines, such as controlled walk-ups, visualisation, or deep focus triggers, helps athletes stay calm and focused under pressure.

2 BREATH CONTROL

Many athletes unconsciously hold their breath or breathe shallowly when anxious, which increases muscle tension and disrupts performance.

Use diaphragmatic breathing before and during competition (e.g. in the call room or before a start) to calm your nervous system. Inhale deeply through the nose, exhale slowly through the mouth, and repeat as needed to stay centred.

3 PRACTICE

Confidence under pressure is a skill that can be trained – not just a mindset you're born with. The more you simulate high-stress situations in training, the more resilient you'll be in real competition. Add pressure elements to your sessions, like setting targets with consequences, running time trials with teammates watching, or mentally rehearsing performing in front of a crowd. Learning to stay calm in important moments starts with accepting that discomfort is part of the process. The goal isn't to remove pressure - it's to become familiar with it.

4 HAVE FUN

Top performers often learn to embrace the pressure rather than fear it. Remind yourself why you started - because you love the sport.

Enjoyment doesn't mean caring less - it means finding joy in the challenge. Keeping perspective helps avoid burnout and promotes long-term success. It's still a race, a throw, a jump - a chance to do what you love, not something to survive.

Sleep hygiene FOR ATHLETES

Recommended sleep quantity

- Adolescent athletes (e.g., 15-18): 8-10 hours
- Young adult/adult athletes (e.g., 18-40): 7-9 hours

Olympic athletes frequently get less than the traditional 8 hours recommended sleep and are reported to only sleep around 6.5–6.8 hours

Importance of sleep in athletes

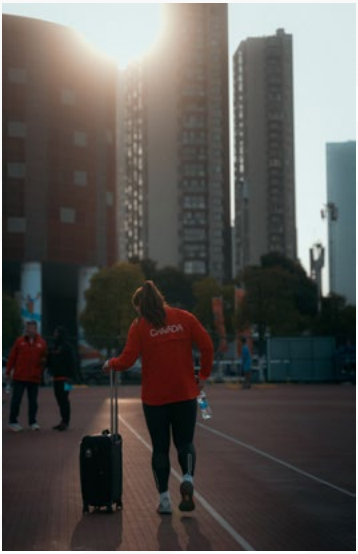
Sleep loss or disturbed sleep can:

- Reduce cognition and neurocognitive performance
- Reduce mental well-being
- Increase mental and physical fatigue
- Impact learning and memory consolidation
- Impact the body's ability to respond to infections
- Impair physical performance
- Increase risk of injuries and illnesses

Factors that can disrupt sleep patterns of athletes

Sport-related

- High training loads (physiological arousal)
- Night competition (post 6pm; physiological and cognitive arousal)
- Long-haul travel (circadian rhythm – your "body clock" – disruption)
- Night before competition (cognitive arousal)
- Early morning training (start pre 8am; schedule)
- Unfamiliar sleeping environment (cognitive arousal)



Non-sport related

- Individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, disability)
- Family commitments (e.g., children, spouse)
- Lifestyle choices (e.g., diet, caffeine, leisure)
- Attitudes and beliefs (e.g., societal influence, individual expectations)
- Work/study commitments (e.g., sponsorship, study or work demands)
- Social demands/needs (e.g., friends, social media)

Athlete sleep hygiene toolkit

Napping

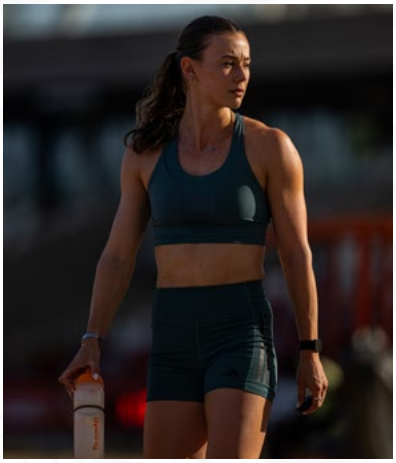
- Napping can supplement insufficient night-time sleep and help improve your physical and cognitive performance, physical recovery, alertness and mental health
- Limiting nap duration to 20–90 minutes and timing the nap between 1-4pm will help lessen impact on nighttime sleep.
- You should leave at least 30 minutes after a nap for grogginess to dissipate (e.g., pre-training).

Banking Sleep

- Banking sleep can include extending sleep in preparation for insufficient sleep or as recovery after poor sleep.
- Sleep extension has potential to improve your performance, mood and reduce stress and anxiety levels especially around pre-competition. Considering many athletes struggle with falling asleep before competitions due to pre-competition nerves, banking sleep can help mitigate the impacts of one poor night of sleep and ease anxiety about receiving insufficient sleep.
- 1-3 weeks of banking sleep is optimal however, even in training camps, a single night of extended sleep can result in improved recovery and stress

Jet Lag

- Jet lag occurs when there is a desychronisation between internal circadian rhythms – your "body clock" – and the external environment after travelling across multiple time zones and can have a significant impact on your sleep.
- If feasible, shift your sleep schedule in the 3 days prior to departure in preparation for travel.
  - For travel from west to east (e.g., Tokyo): Adjust your sleep earlier (e.g. wake up early and go to bed early), get light training and exercise in early (e.g. seek light in the morning and block light in the evening) and shift meals earlier.
- If shifting your schedule pre-trip is not feasible, follow this advice at the destination but base it on your internal time.



Improving sleep hygiene

Sleep hygiene includes the habits necessary to have good sleep quality and daytime alertness no matter what sleep environment you are in (e.g., your home or a hotel). Research has shown that having good sleep hygiene can improve sleep quality.

1. Managing evening light exposure

- Reducing evening exposure (especially within 2 hours before bedtime) to bright and/or blue light (e.g., screens) is important for sleep quality as both can suppress melatonin secretion. Melatonin acts as a signal to the body, indicating nighttime and playing a crucial role in regulating sleep-wake cycles.
- Wearing blue light-blocking amber glasses can preserve melatonin and improve sleep quality.

2. Pre-sleep routine

- Implementing a good pre-sleep routine about an hour before bedtime can help increase sleep quality.
- Avoid screen or social media use prior to sleep. The light exposure and stimulating content from screens and social media usage before bed may result in difficulties falling asleep and poor sleep quality.
- Other off-screen alternatives that will aide you in falling asleep and enhance your sleep quality are: having a warm bath or shower (within 2 hours before going to bed), reading a paper book, stretching, breathing techniques (e.g., 4-7-8*), mindfulness activities (e.g., body scan**), journaling (e.g., writing a to-do-list for day ahead).

*How to practice 4-7-8

4	**BREATHE IN** Breathe in for 4 seconds
7	**HOLD** Hold your breath for 7 seconds
8	**EXHALE** Exhale for 8 seconds

Repeat three or four times.

**How to practice body scans

Find a comfortable position: You can sit in a chair, lie down, or even stand, as long as you feel relaxed and supported.

Close your eyes (or soften your gaze): This can help you focus your attention inward.

Start with deep breaths: Take a few slow, deep breaths to centre yourself and become aware of your breath.

Bring your awareness to your feet: Notice the sensations in your toes, feet, and ankles.

Move your attention up your body: Gradually move your awareness to your legs, hips, abdomen, chest, back, arms, hands, neck, and head.

Notice sensations without judgment: As you scan, observe any sensations you notice – tension, tingling, warmth, coolness, or even the absence of sensation.

Return to your breath when distracted: If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath and then to the body part you were focusing on.

Continue until you reach the top of your head: You can then choose to continue scanning back down or gently bring your awareness back to the present moment.

3. Nutrition

- Avoid stimulants close to bedtime (e.g., caffeine). Caffeine has the potential to disrupt your sleep architecture, delay sleep onset, and reduce sleep quality.
- Avoid large meals too close to bedtime. Where possible avoid heavy meals within 2–3 hours of bedtime. Eating higher carbohydrate foods at night (namely high glycemic index foods such as bread, rice, potatoes) may improve sleep, as well as high protein including tryptophan. High fat intake at night may disrupt sleep, while inadequate total caloric intake during the day may impair sleep at night.
- Avoid alcohol. Alcohol leads to disrupted sleep and a large reduction in REM sleep – which plays a crucial role in memory consolidation, learning, and mood regulation and is associated with better mental health and a stronger immune system – and thus, a has a negative impact on alertness, cognitive functioning and recovery.

4. Sleep environment

- Aim for a cave-like environment (e.g., dark, cool, and quiet).
- Light: turn off lights, cover light sources, and implement blackout curtains to prevent intrusion of outside light.
- Temperature: evidence suggests an ideal sleeping temperature between 16 and 20°C (61 – 68°F).
- Noise: the use of ear plugs or white noise to reduce environmental and external noise can lead to an increase in the amount of deep sleep and reduce chances of waking after sleep onset.

Screen hygiene FOR ATHLETES

Active vs passive use

- Active screen use involves proactive and mindful interaction (e.g., speaking to friends and family) and has generally been shown to lead to better mental health outcomes (e.g., increased well-being, reduced anxiety and depression) through increased perceived social support and social connectedness.
- Passive screen use involves consuming content without meaningfully interacting with it (e.g., mindlessly scrolling, looking at photos, watching videos) and has generally been shown to lead to worse mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, decreased well-being).

Recommendation: Minimise the amount of time you spent passively using screens and focus on interacting with screens in an active and mindful way.

Recognising problematic or excessive screen use

While screen use is not in itself problematic, excessive or problematic use has been shown to have a negative impact on well-being and performance (e.g., burnout, depression, and anxiety). While what constitutes excessive or problematic will vary from person to person, the following are the key signs of problematic or excessive screen use:

- Obsession with screens (i.e., constant preoccupation).
- Experience of unpleasant symptoms when screens are taken away (i.e., withdrawal feelings).

- The need to spend increasing amounts of time engaged in screens.
- Unsuccessful attempts to control screen use (i.e., loss of control).
- Loss of interest in previous hobbies and entertainment as a result of, and with the exception of screen use (i.e., give up or neglect other activities).
- Continued excessive use of screens despite knowledge of psychosocial problems (i.e., inability to move away from or put down screens).
- Deceiving family members, therapists, or others regarding the amount of screen use (i.e., pretending you are not using screens as much as you are).
- Use of screens to escape or relieve negative moods (i.e., trying to distract yourself through screens).
- Jeopardising or losing a significant relationship, job, education or career opportunity because of screen use (i.e., negative consequences).

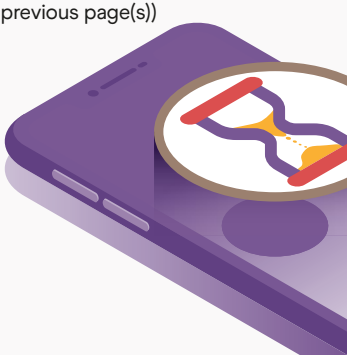
Recommendation: Monitor your screen use and consider both the amount of usage and the feelings you associate before, during and after engaging with screens and seek support if required.

Replacing screen time with offline alternatives

Screen use can become a habit and/or a way to regulate our emotions in stressful or challenging situations. In itself this may not be a negative, however, when we become reliant on screens to cope and/or use screens excessively this has been associated with poor mental health, increased performance anxiety, worry and the development of an addiction.

Evidence-based, offline alternatives include:

- Mindfulness and meditation (e.g., body scan, breathwork – see previous page(s))
- Journalling (e.g., reflective, creative)
- Practice gratitude (e.g., 3 things you are grateful for)
- Catch up with a close friend or family member



- Learn a new skill
- Blue or green exercise (e.g., go for a walk in nature or by the water)
- Read a book

Recommendation: Try replacing passive use screen time (e.g., scrolling, watching videos) with off-screen activities (e.g., mindfulness, practice gratitude, reading a book, journalling etc).

Avoid screen use prior to sleep

- Avoid screen or social media use prior to sleep. The light exposure and stimulating content from screen and social media usage before bed may result in difficulties falling asleep and poor sleep quality. Reducing evening exposure (especially within 2 hours before bedtime) to bright and/or blue light is important for sleep quality as both can suppress melatonin secretion.

Recommendation: Where possible avoid using screens or social media prior to sleep. Instead consider incorporating off-screen alternatives that have been shown to aid you in falling asleep and enhancing sleep quality (e.g., warm bath/shower, mindfulness, journalling).

Using screens as a positive resource

- The use of screens and digital communication platforms has been shown to enhance perceived social support, help you stay connected and provide a sense of community especially during Covid and while away at camps and events.
- Enhanced social support and connectedness can help protect athletes (i.e. social cure) against mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) and can help enhance overall well-being.

Recommendation: Actively use screens and digital communication platforms to help you stay connected to your social support network.

Organise your digital environment

- Evidence has highlighted that social media abuse and the subsequent negative impacts on athlete well-being are heightened around high-profile competitions.
- Additionally, excessive screen and social media use around training and competition can increase anxiety, worry and lead to burnout and concentration difficulties.

Recommendations:

- Limit constant engagement with social media and avoid non-stop posting or checking during competition.
- Limit screen time pre- and post-training and competition.
- Use "off" times or tech-free periods to preserve focus and recovery
- Turn off notifications to limit distractions and increase autonomy around screen use
- Use social media platforms' built-in functions to help minimise negative influences, such as
  - Time management tools (e.g., setting daily limits and switching on sleep mode)
  - Notification management (e.g., pause all (push) notifications)
  - Interaction limits (e.g., turn on 'Limits' for a specific time period to decide who can and can't interact with you)
  - Hidden words (e.g., automatically hides comments that are potentially offensive, hides message requests)
  - Block, mute or restrict accounts you don't want to interact with

ATHLETE RESOURCE CENTRE

The Athlete Zone Resource Centre is your dedicated space to help you thrive, on and off the field of play. Here, you'll find short courses, expert tools and resources to help you take control of your career, elevate your performance, look after your health and safeguard your well-being. From mastering your personal brand and choosing the right Athlete Representative, to optimising your nutrition and staying safe online, this is where you build the knowledge to succeed.

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