

Prevention Co+olumn

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY – OCTOBER 2020

Let performance anxiety work in your favour!

Regardless of the field you work in, your ability to **use stress** to your advantage and **control your reactions** can improve your well-being and simultaneously help you meet your objectives. Whether you're preparing for an exam, an interview, a sporting event or a major presentation, it's very likely that the situation will cause you to **worry**, or experience **stress** and **anxiety**.

- [Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in Canada](#) (among 9% of men and 16% of women)¹
- [One in three Canadians feel stressed to the point where it has an impact on the way they live their lives](#)
- [23% of Canadians felt stressed to the point where they felt like they could not cope with things](#)²

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EXPERIENCE LA CAPITALE'S PREVENTIVE APPROACH



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What is performance anxiety?

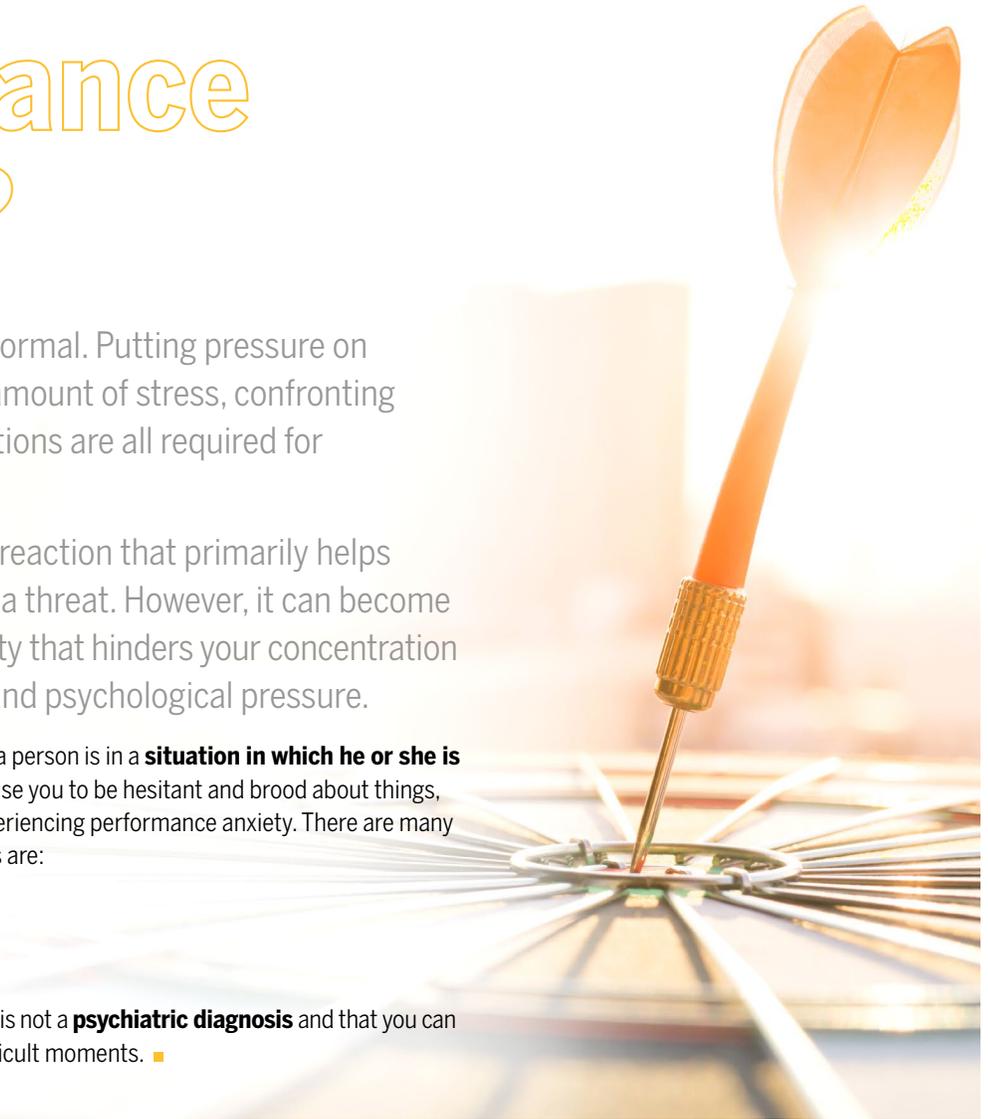
We all want to perform well, it's normal. Putting pressure on yourself, experiencing a certain amount of stress, confronting obstacles and searching for solutions are all required for building our resilience.

Stress is a normal psychological reaction that primarily helps a person confront a challenge or a threat. However, it can become problematic when it causes anxiety that hinders your concentration and creates persistent physical and psychological pressure.

Performance anxiety occurs most often when a person is in a **situation in which he or she is being evaluated**. Doubt, fear and concern cause you to be hesitant and brood about things, which are typical symptoms of individuals experiencing performance anxiety. There are many causes for anxiety, but the most common ones are:

- Fear of failure
- Concern over results
- Concern about what others will think

It's important to note that performance anxiety is not a **psychiatric diagnosis** and that you can take certain measures to help you manage difficult moments. ■



HOW DOES THIS ANXIETY manifest itself?

Remember that most causes of performance anxiety are **potential** and **imagined**. A person experiences anxiety because he or she anticipates what may occur; the brain has difficulty distinguishing between an actual threat and a mere risk.

Performance anxiety manifests itself in various ways:

- **Physically:** fatigue, insomnia, stomach pain, muscle tension, loss of appetite, difficulty concentrating, loss of memory and headaches
- **Psychologically:** nervousness, irritability, concern, worry, negative thoughts, fear of failure, concern over what others think, worry over making mistakes, etc.
- **Personally:** prolong the preparation of a task or invest too much time in it, isolate oneself socially, cancel activities at the last moment, etc. ■

What are the best ways to manage it?

Suggestion 1 – Turn to natural mechanisms

Humans have 4 natural mechanisms to control their energy and properly expend the stress that gets accumulated in a day:

- S: sleep (6-9 hours of sleep per night based on the age group and health)
- E: exercise (the heart is a muscle; to train it, you must move, walk, run, dance...)
- N: nutrition (eat breakfast, stay hydrated, consume fruits and vegetables...)
- S: support (have a good social network, be able to count on someone...)

Suggestion 2 – Concentrate and breathe using the 10-10-10 technique

1. 10 SECONDS – Focus on the BODY and the BREATHING

- Assume a comfortable position.
- Stay in the moment and focus on your breathing. Breathe from your stomach and regulate your breathing (inhale for 5 seconds, exhale for 5 seconds).

2. 10 SECONDS – Focus on your THOUGHTS and HEART

- Breathe steadily and concentrate on the beating of your heart.

3. 10 SECONDS – Focus on POSITIVE EMOTIONS

- Think about happy events, positive words or expressions, a person or location you love to help you feel positive emotions.

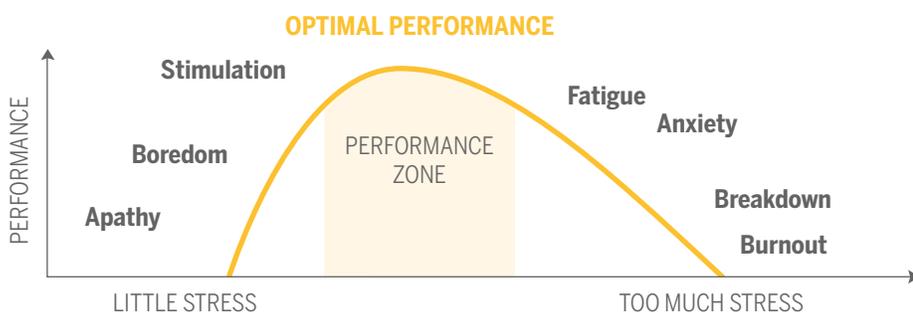
Suggestion 3 – Learn to approach the situation as a challenge

Our perceptions influence our feelings, emotions, thoughts and ultimately, our performance. Train yourself to perceive a stressful situation as a challenge in order to get motivated, excel and have a positive experience.

When the situation seems too threatening, the perception itself can trigger a high-stress psychological reaction. Anxiety, panic and even exhaustion can cause a significant decline in performance; their impact can also hinder your personal well-being.

Remember that an exam, a sporting event or a job interview are not end alls, but steps that we can do over in order to improve.

Impact of stress on performance



Encouraging prospects

Good news: In most situations, our own perceptions are responsible for generating performance anxiety. With some control over our thoughts and reactions, there are simple solutions to help combat stress; they offer you the opportunity to train yourself to face new challenges! ■

GLOSSARY

Worry is a feeling that guides our thoughts toward what could go wrong. Worry is important and useful, because it allows you to adjust your behaviour to attain your objectives (e.g.: studying hard before an exam you believe will be difficult).

Fear is an emotion that activates our body when facing a real and immediate threat (e.g.: a bear appears).

Anxiety refers to a normal emotion that occurs after recurrent thoughts regarding a potential and distant threat (e.g.: obsessively worrying about making mistakes before an interview). Anxiety is always accompanied by physiological reaction of stress that can negatively impact behaviour.

An anxious state corresponds to a temporary feeling.

An anxious trait is in reference to an anxious personality. You may be genetically predisposed to worrying and wanting to always be in control.

An anxiety disorder is uncontrolled anxiety that can be triggered by phobias, panic attacks and obsessive compulsive problems. It's a mental illness.

Stress is a physiological reaction triggered by a real or perceived threat. It is always accompanied by emotions, and its effects vary based on our perceptions. It may cause a beneficial effect when it is perceived as useful and necessary to take on a challenge; it can however have a negative effect if the situation is perceived as threatening and the anxiety level is already high.

Resilience is an essential quality defined as internal strength that allows you to persevere when faced with a significant challenge. It develops with experience and encouragement from our loved ones. ■

1. A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada (2002). Available online: https://mdsc.ca/documents/Publications/Report%20on%20mental%20illness%20in%20canada_EN.pdf

2. Statista: The statistics portal. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/788827/canadian-adults-select-mental-health-issues/>