

# Motivational Benefits of Meditation

Looking inward can boost your athletic performance

**I**f you're a high-energy type, staring at your navel is probably the last thing you would do. **By Melanie Votaw**

But what if meditation could actually make your workouts better? What if it could motivate you and improve athletic performance?

First, let's get one thing straight. Meditation is not about staring at your navel. It's actually a form of heightened concentration, and athletes know all too well the importance of concentration. Just ask a football player who constantly fumbles the ball, a figure skater who falls repeatedly after the first mistake, or a tennis player who double faults on a serve when the score reaches 30/Love in the opponent's favor.

Simply put, the better you can focus on what you want to accomplish, the better you'll perform. And meditation can help you do just that. Think about the benefits for Olympic athletes who have only one chance for a medal. If they can't keep their anxieties in check, it's all over.

Meditation improves focus by teaching you to ease the chatter in your mind. For example, if there's a big game coming up that fills you with anxiety and insecurity, meditation can help you ignore the fear voices and concen-

trate on the task at hand. The ability to ignore negative mind chatter has a

calming effect, and many people use meditation for stress relief.

There's yet another way you can use meditation to increase self-confidence. You simply visualize yourself working out better, winning the game, or surpassing your goals. A runner, for example, will see herself over and over in her mind reaching the finish line first. It may sound like nothing more than a teenage dream sequence in a movie, but think about it. When an athlete breaks a record, suddenly other athletes are able to match that record. After the psychological barrier of belief has been broken, everyone knows it's possible. So, the mind definitely plays a role in what you can and can't accomplish. The more you visualize doing it well, the more you will believe in yourself. You could even say meditation is fitness for the mind.

Martial artists have used meditation for centuries to gain better control over their minds and bodies. Often called "sitting practice," meditation is so ancient that no one knows exactly how

You might want to try concentrative meditation first, but if it proves difficult, go straight to visualizing after the body relaxation.

