**How can I learn to better concentrate?**

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*I play high school baseball and I would like to improve my hitting. My coach says my swing is good but I need to concentrate better at the plate. However, I am not sure how to do that. Can you help me learn to concentrate?*
Concentration is critical to sport performance. That is why coaches are always telling athletes to concentrate. Unfortunately, coaches do not always give specific information on how to concentrate.
Yet, all is not lost. Experienced coaches and sport psychologists have identified a number of things you can do to improve your concentration and attention and, in so doing, improve your hitting.

First, let’s begin by defining attention and concentration. Concentration involves: selectively attending to or focusing on relevant sport tasks (e.g., watch the pitcher’s arm when throwing) and ignoring irrelevant aspects (e.g., a runner breaking off second base); (2) maintaining attentional focus over time (e.g., maintaining your concentration throughout an entire game); and (3) having situational awareness or the ability to size up game situations (e.g., knowing when to take a pitch). So my first suggestion would be to think about which of the three aspects of attention you struggle with.

If you have trouble knowing what to focus on talk to your coach and have him give you some things to focus on when you are hitting (e.g., pitcher’s elbow). Hall of Famer, Hank Aaron, for example, used to watch the opposing pitcher throughout the game (even when he was not a bat). When in the dugout he would take his cap off and look at the pitcher’s arm through the eyelet of his cap. This would help him focus on the pitcher’s arm movements. Similarly, when Mark McGuire set the then home run record a few years ago millions of fans observed him closing his eyes and visualizing himself hit in the on-deck circle —a way to increase concentration.

Maintaining attentional focus can be developed by establishing physical and mental routines prior to every at bat. So make sure you do the same physical (e.g., tap plate twice with bat, take a practice cut, focus on the ball in the pitchers hand) and mental (e.g., take a deep breath, say “ready to go”) actions before each pitch, but especially when you are frustrated. You can also practice eye control. Make it a habit to look at the same focus point (e.g., the pitcher’s arm) every time you step in the batter’s box.

Finally, improve your situational awareness by studying the game and talking to your coach. Knowing when you should hit behind the runner, to step out of the batter’s box and slow the game when the opposing pitcher is in the groove, or when to swing at a ball to protect a teammate attempting to steal second are essential skills. In fact, highly regarded college baseball coach and President of USA Baseball Mike Gaski emphasizes to his players they should always understand the game situation and then set a plan in their head every time they step into the batter’s box.

Other strategies for improving concentration include using simulations in practice (when taking batting practice imagine you are in a stressful situation and then step out of the box and execute your routine before every pitch) and use cue words to ready yourself (e.g., say “focus” or “relax”) to keep your mind occupied in a positive way.

Most importantly, focus on one pitch at a time. That is, if you swing at a bad pitch, or make a mental mistake take a deep breath and calm yourself. Then, learn to discipline yourself by focusing on the next pitch. You cannot have the last pitch back so thinking about the mistake you just made will only disrupt your attention.

Last but certainly not least, remember that while using these techniques will help you help improve your concentration this will not happen overnight. You will need to work on these techniques every day and slowly your concentration will improve with practice.

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- See more at: http://edwp.educ.msu.edu/isys/2012/how-can-i-learn-to-better-concentrate/#sthash.4U0viJbD.dpuf