

## Psych Recommendations for OTC Selection Mental Prep



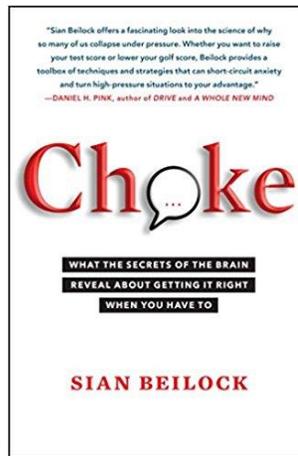
### Getting the most out of your performance:

Performing when the pressure is on is, without a doubt, necessary in this environment. Studies of professional and Olympic athletes of all kinds have discovered two major routes to poor performance: *distraction and explicit monitoring*. For some, choking occurs because attention needed to perform the task at hand is stolen by task-irrelevant thoughts and worries (distraction). Toss aside the interrupting thoughts such as “Who is watching me? How are they rating me? What did they think of that? What if I screw up in front of them?” For others, the opposite occurs. Pressure prompts us to attend so closely to skill processes that it disrupts our execution (explicit monitoring). You begin to check and double-check every choice rather than allowing your muscle memory to guide you.

The goal is to avoid choking under pressure by developing mental skills that increase your ability to 1) accurately assess your stress (knowing how your mind and body respond to stress), and 2) strategically move yourself along the continuum of relaxed to amped utilizing tactical breathing, visualization, a physical movement that gets you in “the zone”, and mental mottos to create a solid pre-performance routine (“breathe”, “you got this”, “you’re going to crush this”, etc.

Check out these resources for more on this topic:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-new-you/201507/how-stop-choking-under-pressure>



Choke by Sian Beilock

### Handling the mental stress of selection:

Selection is going to be stressful. This is a fact. However, stress can be really helpful for performance when used positively. This type of stress is called *eustress*. Stress is positive when it forces us to adapt and thus to increase the strength of our coping skills, warns us that we are not coping well and that a lifestyle change is warranted if we are to maintain optimal health. This action-enhancing stress gives the athlete the competitive edge and the public speaker the enthusiasm to project optimally. Stress is negative when it exceeds our ability to cope, fatigues body systems and causes behavioral or physical problems. This harmful stress is called *distress*. Distress produces overreaction, confusion, poor concentration and performance anxiety and usually results in sub-par performance. You'll notice that, under a certain amount of stress, performance is enhanced, but then starts to decline when too much stress is applied. Additionally, studies have shown that short-term stress boosted the immune system, but chronic stress has a significant effect on the immune system that ultimately manifest in illness. Chronic stress has been linked to poor attention, memory, learning, and a number of physical illnesses as well.

Interestingly, the parts of your brain that process emotion are different from those that execute rational thought. As one turns on, the other is effectively turned off. In other words, as your brain experiences distressing emotions, the "thinking" part of your brain takes a backseat, making it more and more difficult to think, plan, and execute effectively.

Here are a few tips for combating stress. If you can incorporate these basics into your daily routine, your body and brain will certainly benefit now and even during stressful periods like selection.

- 1) Recognize that stress is normal and unavoidable, but not all stress is bad. Be deliberate about building basic stress relievers into your routine (exercise regularly, eat well, rest, create quiet moments, get outside, connect with people you care about).
- 2) Take control of your how you interpret the stress: **Those that see stress as a challenging opportunity rather than an inescapable fate fare much better. Take action and remain future-oriented when you feel the pull to sit and ruminate. When things aren't going your way, it doesn't help to ruminate on them. Think instead about how to learn from that experience and use it to make the most of the next event.**
- 3) Take control of how you view yourself: **Those who see themselves as something other than a helpless victim to their circumstances are better able to adapt and cope.**
- 4) **Maintain a healthy sense of humor. Seriously. Laugh at yourself.**

To see something really interesting and better understand the adages “**what doesn't kill us makes us stronger**” and “**just keep swimming**”, check out the ex-planation of a study Psychologist Curt Richter conducted in 1957.

[https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_suj3wakGJw](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=_suj3wakGJw)

He put individual mice in a bucket of circulating water. Most died after just 10-15 minutes. With another group, he did the same thing, except that, at 15 minutes, he took them out, let them rest, and then put them back in. Guess how long they survived? **60 HOURS! 240 times longer.** The point? Having hope that the stress will eventually be removed/lessened will keep you going.

For true human stories about beating challenges like this, check out Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why by Laurence Gonzales or The Upside of Stress by Kelly McGonigal.

