

Breaking out of a slump.

Your question addresses your need to break out of a batting slump and develop a positive attitude. In my years of experience in working with hitters I have found that the most effective mental strategy for achieving your goal is to apply the 3P's, which stand for **Present, Positive, Process**. To execute this strategy properly you will need to engage in a few preliminary exercises.

Present – Part I

Exercise #1: Breath In – Breath Out

Set aside 5 to 10 minutes to sit in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Focus your attention on the feeling of breathing in and breathing out. Notice your chest expand and contract and the feeling of the air as it passes through your nose and throat. Now use that little voice in the back of your mind to say, “This is my in breath” each time you inhale and say, “This is my out breath” as you exhale. Let your mind be totally focused on the experience of breathing in and breathing out as you repeat these phrases to yourself mentally and silently. You will notice a sense of calm and quiet as you do this for a few minutes. Repeat this exercise 3 to 4 times per day for 2 days before proceeding to the next exercise.

Exercise #2: Stepping into the Circle

This exercise involves imagining a protective sphere about 6 feet in diameter forming all around you as you do your Breath-In/Breath-Out exercise. Enjoy a sense of total protection and security while in this imaginary sphere. Connect to a feeling of being in control, confident and relaxed. Conduct this exercise 4 times over the course of a day before proceeding to the next step.

Present – Part II

This next part needs to be conducted on the field during batting practice. Create an imaginary circle about 6 feet in diameter all around you as you step into the batter's box. When you step up to the plate feel yourself inside this circle. Leave all the distractions on the outside of the circle and feel totally protected from all external stimuli while in the circle. Take a deep breath and as you exhale feel a sense of calm and quiet.

By conducting these exercises both off the field and during practice you are training yourself to remain in the present and stay focused on what you want to experience during each at bat.

Positive Exercise

The key to good hitting is maintaining a positive attitude. Given that even a highly respectable .400 hitter gets a hit only 4 out of 10 at bats, it is easy to see how frustration and negative thinking can result if your sole goal for each at bat is to get a hit. Several players I have worked with have created a positive attitude and improved their hitting by focusing on the process of hitting (what they will do) for each at bat rather than the outcome (getting a hit). They would use positive self talk in the on-deck circle and repeat things like, “My forearms will be relaxed as I swing”, “ I will make solid contact”, or “I

will step into the pitch”, etc. After each at bat they reflected on whether they were able to accomplish these process goals so as to experience something positive about that at bat. So next time you are in the on-deck circle select one positive thing to focus on that you can execute while at bat. Success at those goals will provide you with the feedback necessary to maintain a positive attitude and improve your hitting.

Process Exercise

As you can see from the Staying Positive strategy, you need to find a specific aspect of your swing to focus on while at bat. This is done by paying close attention to what you are doing when you hit the ball well. During the next few batting practices conduct this simple exercise to determine your “process cue” for hitting. This exercise employs a powerful behavior change system based upon the idea that every behavior (i.e. good swing) is associated with a specific mental focus composed of visual and bodily perceptions. The art of this approach is to detect the exact images that you were seeing and feeling while you were executing the desired behavior (making contact with the bat). Here is how it works. When you find that you have hit the ball well, stop for a moment and replay your swing in your mind. Take note of what imagery was most prominent in your mind as you made contact. Continue to do this until you have a good sense of what you are seeing when you make contact. This is your visual cue.

In the second part of this exercise you will pay close attention to the sensation in your body you were aware of during your swing. For example, you might be aware of the turn of your hips or shoulders, the strength of your grip on the bat, or the shifting of weight from one foot to the other. Check in on any feelings of lightness, looseness, or tension. This will provide information on your body cues. Now you can select a particular cue (visual or body) to focus on during your actual at bats. This is your Process Cue.

By now you are keenly aware that getting both your batting and attitude back on track will require that for each at bat you:

1. Stay in the Present
2. Keep Positive
3. Focus on your Process cue

By working diligently on the sport psychology exercises provided you will enjoy yourself again in no time. I have included two other sport psychology training references for baseball below. Remember, follow-up consultation is also available via the www.minplusmuscle.com website.

Stay Focused.
Dr. Bowman

Additional Information that might be helpful

1. The Mental Game of Baseball, Dorfman, H., Diamond Communications, South Bend, In. 1989
2. The Baseball Mental Training Room, Bowman, J., Mind Plus Muscle. Port Jefferson Station, NY. 1994 (order on line @ www.mindplusmuscle.com)

