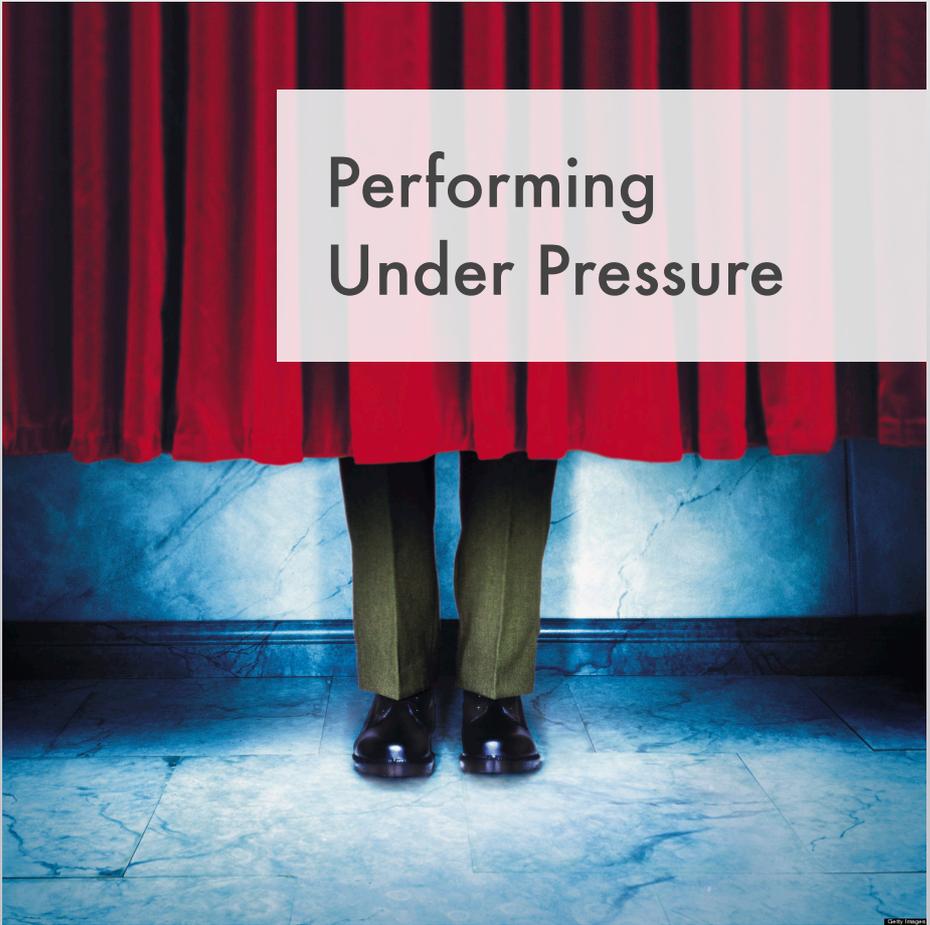


TIP SHEET

If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath.
– Amit Ray

Performing Under Pressure

A photograph showing the lower half of a person standing on a stage. They are wearing dark trousers and black shoes. The stage floor is light-colored with a blue glow. Behind them are red curtains and a blue-lit wall.

Feeling pressure to perform

Feeling nervous is a completely normal response when you are under pressure to perform in public. People commonly feel like this in a range of experiences such as giving a speech, performing music or meeting new people in social situations.

Many people experience this type of anxiety which includes some famous high profile characters, e.g. Hugh Grant, Gandhi, and Barbra Streisand. Most people would rather have the flu than give a performance in front of a public audience!

What reactions do people experience when they are under pressure to perform?

Often when people feel stressed about a performance they experience a fight or flight response. This survival mechanism is triggered in order to prepare you to face a stressful situation. A fight or flight response can include symptoms such as:

- Increased heart and breathing rate
- Muscle tension
- Sweaty and cold hands
- Nausea and butterflies in the stomach
- Dry mouth and tight throat

When does performance anxiety become a problem?

Performance anxiety can become a problem when it becomes overwhelming and inhibits performance; it also causes an issue when it causes someone to avoid all similar situations in the future. It is a problem when it disrupts everyday function and stops you from doing things that you want (e.g. something for your own pleasure) or need (e.g. for work) to do.

What can cause performance anxiety to become a problem?

- If you already experience some form of anxiety
- Having a fear of failure
- Feeling distress over being judged, often due to past experiences
- Not having prior experience with performing in these types of situations
- Experiencing negative and disabling thoughts about your ability to perform

Performance anxiety is generally a self-sustaining fear, because it affects your performance which can increase negative thoughts and fears, as well as lower confidence in your abilities. However, there are strategies to better manage performance anxiety.

How to manage your performance anxiety - here are some ACTIONS:

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Having a healthy lifestyle can assist you to manage performance anxiety more effectively. Particularly having a regular exercise routine, even if it is just going for a walk, or whatever exercise you most enjoy. Eating healthy food and getting good quality sleep can also assist. When we look after our body, we are less reactive to stress and don't become overwhelmed by the physiological changes which accompany anxiety



Relaxation techniques

Leading up to the performance, you can use a range of relaxation techniques to help calm yourself down. One of the most effective techniques is to simply practice deep breathing from your diaphragm. Try breathing in slowly and deeply through your nose, holding for a few seconds, and then breathing out slowly through your mouth. Another thing to try is practicing mindfulness by focusing on all the sensations of the present moment, such as the details of what you can see or hear. This can help to redirect any negative or anxious thoughts you have about performing.



Practice, practice, practice

The best thing you can do leading up to a performance, is to ensure you are prepared. If you are giving a speech make sure you have rehearsed fully. It really is true what they say that practice makes perfect. It is important to maximise your chances of performing well under pressure. This can also ease any feelings of self-doubt in your abilities. Further, the more you practice performing when you are under pressure, the easier it will be to manage performance anxiety.



Tips for the performance

Often our thoughts leading up to the performance are the worst part of performing. Here are some tips for how to manage anxiety before and during a performance:

- Acknowledge any fears you have about performing
- Focus on the positive and visualize yourself performing confidently
- Before the performance try to release built up tension, e.g. stretch out your muscles, go for a walk, or take some deep breaths
- Focus on your enjoyment of the performance, rather than your anxiety about it
- Remember why you are doing the performance
- During the performance establish contact with the audience, e.g. make eye contact with friendly looking audience members or try to engage the audience by asking questions
- After the performance focus on what went well and congratulate yourself for getting through it successfully!

ONLINE RESOURCES

- A personal story about experiencing performance anxiety from one of our volunteers:
- <https://www.adavic.org.au/PG-personal-stories-performance-anxiety-by-shelley.aspx>
- Boost is an app which helps you to overcome negative thoughts leading up to a performance:
- <http://www.drolshan.com/boost-iphone-app/>
- Another app called Mindshift can help you work through everyday anxiety and gives strategies for dealing with specific situations, such as performance anxiety:
- <http://www.anxietybc.com/mobile-app>

BOOKS

- "Performance Anxiety: A workbook for actors, singers, dancers and anyone who performs in public" Maisel, 2005
- "Overcoming Performance Anxiety" Simon & Schuster, 2001

