

by Michael O'Shea

# Think Yourself Fit

**I**F AN ATHLETE HITS A slump or a team needs a boost, coaches turn to sports psychologists for help. You can benefit from their tips, too. "What we think profoundly affects our bodies and performance," says Vic Braden, a longtime sports psychologist. Here's how to get into a winning frame of mind:

**THINK SMALL** "Start with realistic goals you know you can accomplish, like losing two pounds or being active three days a week," Braden says. These little successes will help to change your self-image. "By going slowly, you can accomplish big things."

**BREATHE DEEPLY** "Most athletes don't perform up to their ability not because their bodies fail but because their minds buckle," says Brian Alman, an expert in sports psychology. He recommends a simple breathing exercise whenever you need a quick boost: "Breathing is the link between mind and body. Take 10 deep breaths with your eyes closed. As you inhale, say, 'I feel calm and powerful,' and as you exhale, say your name."

**GET PAST A SETBACK** "It's normal to have moments when you want to give up," Alman says. "But don't get stuck being critical of occasional relapses. When they happen, think one step forward, two steps inward. You have to let go of trying to be perfect."

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