

Flow

Getting "In the Zone" to Improve your Health



Centre for Chiropractic & Sports Rehabilitation

An integrative, biomechanical approach to the everyday sports and spinal injuries.

Have you ever been *in the zone*? How about *on a roll* or *completely focused*? If so, you've been one of the lucky 85% of people who have experienced **flow**. Flow, as first outlined by Hungarian Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is a state of being completely absorbed in an activity. When you're in a state of flow, you lose sense of time. Any anxiety that the activity presents melts away and your need for control and success disappear: instead, you just *know* that you'll be successful. Flow is the state that intrinsically motivates people to continue doing the activities that you love.

We know that some days, at-home therapy can be difficult. Dr. LaBelle often prescribes challenging activities, and if you feel like these activities are outside of your skill level, you'll never be motivated to do them! **We encourage you to investigate flow in your therapy**, because achieving flow will ensure that you keep coming back to your therapeutic exercises, helping you achieve lifelong strength and health!

The Four Factors of Flow:

Csikszentmihalyi identified four factors of activities that allow for flow. Implement these factors to help you achieve flow in your therapy.

1) **The goals are clear.** The goals of your activity need to be clear and measurable. Set a goal to perform all of your prescribed exercises for seven days a week!

2) **Feedback is immediate.** Your therapy exercises naturally provide immediate feedback. Take note of any pains while performing these exercises, and pay particular attention to your successes! After a few days of performing an activity, your skill level will increase and odds are you'll be much more successful.

3) **There is a balance between opportunity and capacity.** Figure 1 (right) illustrates the flow model: you achieve a state of flow when your skill level corresponds with the challenge level of an activity. When you're learning an activity – a new stretch, for example – your skill level will be lower than the challenge level, making it difficult to achieve flow. These new exercises *do* require practice to build your skill level. Once you've increased your skill level, you'll likely find that your skills correspond with the challenge of the activity. At this point, you're very likely to achieve a state of flow! As your skills in any activity improve, set goals that challenge you a bit more. If you find that you can perform a therapy exercise with control or relaxation, ask Dr. LaBelle to provide you with more challenging movements. This will ensure that you are consistently achieving a state of flow!

4) **You allow yourself to concentrate deeply**, without thoughts outside of the immediate activity. One of the most difficult things to do in today's world is to allow yourself to concentrate fully, but allowing yourself to concentrate on *just* the activity will help you get into a state of flow. Let go of thoughts outside of the activity and just sink into the actions. The outcome – the flow – is incredible!

Finding flow in your home therapy combines the benefit of Finding flow in your physical activity combines benefits of meditation (living in the moment) with physical wellness (consistent, challenging practice). In fact, flow is so motivating in itself that getting in the zone will keep you passionate about being active, one of the secrets to managing your optimal health forever!

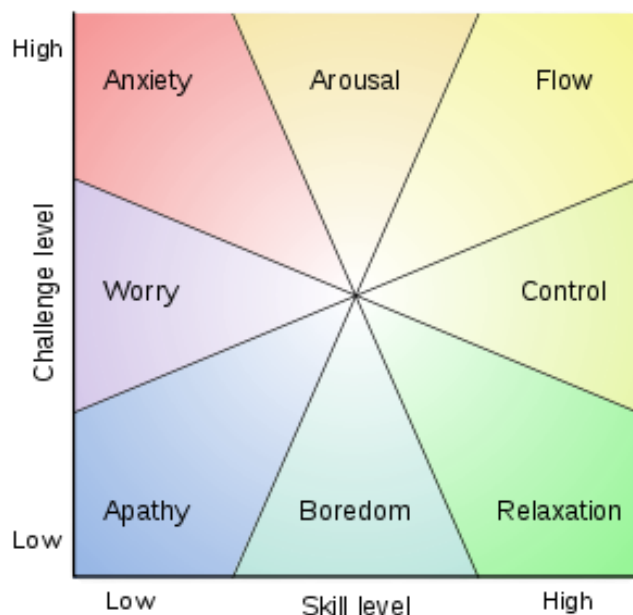


Figure 1: The Flow Model