Two Kinds Of Slumps

Every hitter who has ever played the games has experienced a batting slump. How a hitter responds to a slump is extremely important and will directly affect his efforts to get back on a track to hitting the ball hard and productively.

First of all, there is more than one kind of slump that hitters often endure. Some slumps are simply number slumps. For example, you may be drilling the ball almost at every at bat yet have no hits to show for it. You may hit four consecutive line drives and each one is caught by a fielder. Even though you are 0-4 in the box score, does that mean you in a slump? Of course not. In reality, you are in a good hitting groove. The difficult part is to convince yourself that to ignore the numbers. That is where trust and confidence in yourself comes in. If you believe in your ability, you will continue with the same mental approach even though the results are not rewarding.

Some hitters can get swayed into believing that they need to make adjustments in order to get those line drives to fall for hits. If a hitter hits a line drive, he should claim a victory no matter whether it is an out or a hit. Hitting the ball flat and hard should be the goal of all hitters. Those lines drives will eventually find a hole. Don’t panic.

The other kind of slump is the 0-June type characterized by weak ground outs and pop-outs. In this type of slump, your mechanics are out of sync. Your swing is probably as messed up as your head. You are taking pitches right down the middle and swinging at ball in the dirt. You are miserable, and your mental approach is poor. If you are in this type of slump, you belong to a club that has thousands of members, because all hitters have suffered this particular type of slump. You worry that you will never ever get another hit. Now you need to address what is wrong. Just know the difference.
**Success Can Breed Slumps**

Believe it or not, hitters can fall into slumps because of success. In this situation, the hitter becomes overconfident in his hitting ability. He tries to hit the ball harder and farther than his last at bat and ends up over swinging, upper cutting, or swinging at balls out of the strike zone. Once any of these tendencies begin, the hitter’s swing mechanics begin to fall apart. In college and professional baseball, the team’s hitting coach can quickly detect the above problems and provide instruction immediately. On the lower level, this might not be the case. It is important for a hitter to aggressive and confident at the plate, but being selective is also extremely important. **Swing at strikes!**

**Lack of Attention To Details**

Most slumps develop over time. Hitters do not wake up in the morning with a slump. The majority of slumps develop gradually due to a hitter’s lack of attention or inability to fully grasp his hitting mechanics. On the Big League level, Tony Gywnn made it a practice to have all of his game at bats video taped so that he could analyze each swing after the game. As one of the better hitters who ever played the game, he was fanatical in maintaining his batting mechanics. It is not wonder, that he was capable during his long career, avoid prolonged slumps due to mechanical problems.

On the lower levels, sometimes the mentality of “if it is not broke don’t fix it” comes into play. Many young hitters fail to fully comprehend how important good mechanics are and how critical it is to regularly practice and drill to develop and/or maintain proper hitting fundamentals. Many young hitters experience success early simply due to their physical superiority, and/or poor pitching & defense skills of their opponents that they are lulled into a false sense of security that their mechanics are fine. When the pitching becomes better or the other players catch up to due to physical maturation over the course of a year or two, suddenly those poor mechanics prevents the required continued development that a young player needs in order to move from for example, a 12 year old league to a 13/14 year old league.
Slump Busters

When a hitter falls into a slump, normally he will begin to receive advice from every direction. Mom, Dad, Coach, teammates, and the mailman all have the solution to get the young hitter out of his slump. The important thing is to take advice only from those you trust. Your coach or the local hitting instructor for example would be the logical first place to start. Good hitting instructors do not overload the hitter with too much data. They keep it simple. Often there are easy mechanical answers to the problem. Hitters should also do the same. Look for the simple solutions (i.e. poor pitch selection, jumping at the ball, etc.) Block out all ridiculous advice and get back to the basics.

Mental Strategy To Get Out Of A Slump

Once the hitter has identified the problem either by himself or with the assistance of a coach/hitting instructor, he must convince himself that he can again be successful. They must need to realize to accept a certain amount of failure. Failure is inevitable and all good hitters learn to accept some failure. A season is a marathon, not a sprint. In the major leagues, most hitters get about 650 at bats during the season. A 200 hit season for a Big Leaguer is a good season. So do the math. If a Big Leaguer gets 200 hits in 650 at bats, his average is .308 How many at bats did he fail to get a hit in? The answer: 450 at bats or approximately 70%. Get the idea? Accepting some degree of failure is step number 1.

Step number 2 may sound like something out of a self-help book but it does have some merit: **Take baby steps.** When you are trying to break out of a slump, seek small rewards at the beginning. Go into a game with a modest goal such as “Today, I want to hit one ball right on the screws! If I can do that, I going to be happy and sleep well.” After a few games, you may tell yourself today, I want to hit two balls hard. What you are doing is promoting self-confidence. Slowly as you continue to reach your modest goals, you begin to believe in yourself again. You are training your brain to thinks positively again. Instead of negative thoughts that you most likely had during your slump, you begin to think that you are capable of success.

Another element to remember about slumps and adversity in this great game, is that as painful as they are to endure, they do make you stronger. The German philosopher Nietzsche was correct when he uttered “that which does not kill me, makes me stronger!” How true. Being able to fight through slumps and tough times prepares you for life’s future
potholes, future slumps. Once you get through one slump, you can always tell yourself you can get through another!

Tony Gwynn
Eight Time Batting Champion