



**8 MENTAL GAME  
STRATEGIES TO  
BREAK THE**

# **YIPS CYCLE**

**FREE BASEBALL YIPS REPORT**

**PATRICK J. COHN, PH.D.**

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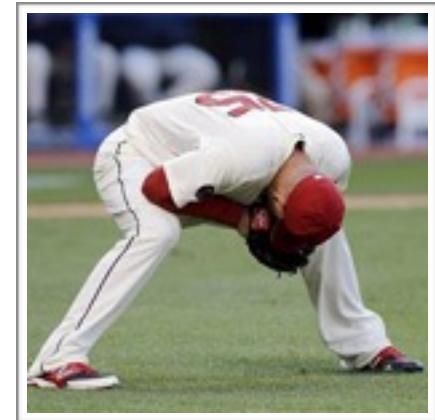
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## 8 Mental Strategies to Break The Yips Cycle

### Introduction

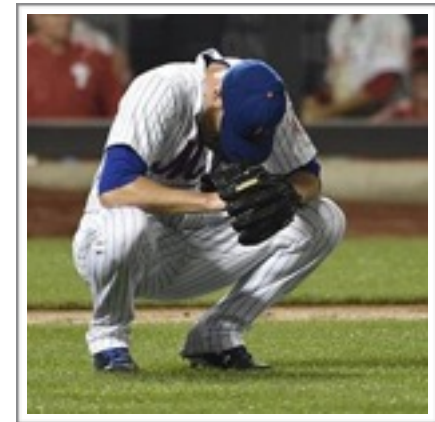
The throwing "yips" are one of baseball's least understood challenges for players. The yips—missing easy throws you once could make with your eyes' closed—drive good baseball players to give up the game. Baseball is not enjoyable when you have the yips—it's frustrating and embarrassing. When you label yourself as having the yips, you think you have an incurable disease.



Why are the yips so difficult to overcome for baseball players? In their pursuit to find a solution, players get worse because of over thinking and over analyzing. When you have the yips, your confidence suffers because making poor throws prevents you from playing well in games. Then the fear of missing a routine throw makes matters worse.

Players who suffer from the fear of missing a simple throw dread throwing during important plays. The more they try to make a good throw, the worse it gets, until they lose full control. This leads players to believe they have an affliction or disease that they must learn to play with. When baseball players believe they have the yips, it's extremely hard to grow their confidence and trust in their skills.

The baseball yips can begin with a poor outing and in some cases missing routine throws and easy pitches. Players then progress to the fear of making more bad throws, which intensifies the fear of the yips. Most players feel like it's a physical condition; they believe that it can be corrected with a simple change in technique or routine.



But I'm here to tell you the yips start with faulty thinking and not a faulty technique or the wrong throwing motion. *Fear, anxiety, and over-control are the culprits that keep you stuck in a vicious cycle of fearful throwing!*

Intense anxiety or fear does not allow you to move your arm freely. When you can't throw freely, your arm movement, timing, and release are out of sync. You might even freeze up and can't initiate the wind up. Another common type of the yips occurs when you tense up and control the release of the throw.

## What Are The Yips?

The throwing yips are another variety of the "yips." I have worked with many players who had problems with the golf yips, service yips, and the throwing yips. The throwing yips, although uncommon in baseball, are super hard to shake because you stay stuck for long period of time in the "yips cycle."



When you have the throwing yips, you simply can't release the ball freely or send it to your target easily. Most ball players with the pitching or throwing yips lose control of their accuracy and can't hit a target with consistency. Some players might pause or freeze during the throwing motion. Others can start the wind up and then jerk their arm forward. The throwing yips can affect pitchers, catchers, and infielders alike.

According to the Mayo Clinic, they report that having the yips is both psychological and neurological. In their opinion, performance anxiety about the outcome leads to muscle spasms, which causes athletes to feel out of control. They also report that athletes with the yips have a neurological problem called “focal dystonia.” I agree that the yips are highly related to performance anxiety. I’m not sure I agree with the conclusion that the yips are caused by a neurological problem.

In my opinion after working with several athletes with the yips, the main problem is **performance anxiety and fear of failure**. Ball players who have a bad outing usually start to look for solutions and tinker with their mechanics, which makes matters worse. In many cases, they begin to worry about the outcome and how others view the problem.

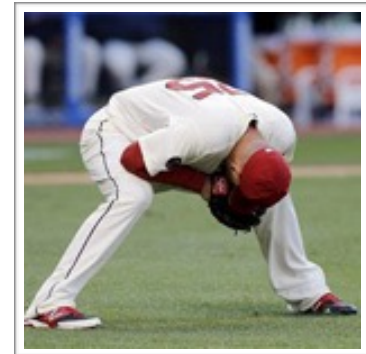


In one case of the throwing yips, I worked with a high school catcher that could not throw the ball back to the pitcher consistently with accuracy. You know that throwing the ball back to the pitcher between pitches does not impact the outcome of the game. He would stand up and throw the ball back to the pitcher, but could not hit the target, often throwing a

blooper. What's interesting is that he could throw well to second base with little to no problem when it counted during a game! Is this a physical problem with his mechanics? Or is this a mental game problem? The yips are mental.

*If the yips are mental, what's the solution? First, you have to simplify your throwing motion again, not make it more complex or perfect. Second, you have to gain back the freedom of the throw—just like you are playing catch as a kid. Third, as you gain confidence, your freedom and your accuracy begin to return.*

The throwing yips can affect other parts of your mental game such as confidence, focus, trust in your skills, and the ability to focus on the process. The most difficult part about the yips is that it turns into a negative cycle for most players. This means the yips perpetuates itself and keeps players stuck. I call this negative cycle: **“The Yips Cycle.”**



## What is the Yips Cycle?

The yips cycle starts with a series of events that keeps you stuck in a never-ending cycle of poor throwing because the yips never allows you to regain confidence and trust in your throw.

### Phases of the YIPS CYCLE:

- PAST YIPS OR MISSING THROWS-->
- FEAR OF MAKING MORE BAD THROWS-->
- TRY TO AVOID EMBARRASSMENT-->
- OVER-CONTROL YOUR ACTION-->
- YIP OR LACK OF FREEDOM-->
- I'VE FAILED/SCREWED UP AGAIN-->
- I FEEL EMBARRASSED OR FRUSTRATED-->
- OTHERS SEE ME MESS UP-->
- I MUST BE A FAILURE-->
- ATTEMPT TO FIX MOTION -->
- START CYCLE AGAIN-->





The yips actually can begin with a poor outing or a couple bad throws in a game and in some cases, botching routine throws or pitches. The yips can also begin when you make a lot of changes to your technique, such as when a new pitching coach changes your motion. This causes you to over think your mechanics and not trust the throw. Poor results or yips from the past haunt you because you think the yips will come again. Fear of embarrassment from missing routine throws brings on tension and anxiety, which leads to over thinking and over control of your throwing action.

Next, the **over thinking and over control** makes you yip again because of “paralysis by over analysis” and information overload. Over thinking and over control is at the heart of the yips cycle because it keeps you stuck in army pitching: left-right-left-right. You might feel embarrassed or frustrated with missing throws. You’ve failed at a simple task that used to come easily. You assume others think you are messing up or failing and this is uncomfortable and not healthy for your confidence and self-esteem. The yips cycle is in full bloom.



The yips might feel like a physical problem to you, but the yips start in the mind. If you can throw accurately and freely in practice situations and it only happens when you start a game or throw right before a game, that's a good sign that it's not physical and it's mental. Flinching, freezing, or manipulating your release are symptoms of bigger issues: fear of failure and performance anxiety.

*You have to understand that changing your grip, stance, or mechanics are only temporary Band-Aids to a mental game issue.*

## First, How Do You Know You Have the Yips?

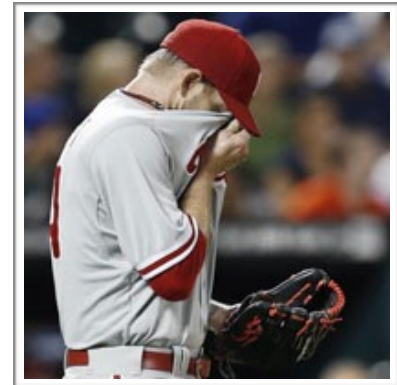
All baseball players make a bad throw or two in their career, right? So how do you know you have the full-blown yips and are not just in a mini-slump? The most apparent sign: *You throw well in practice or the bullpen, but feel tense, flinch, or manipulate your arm action when you play in a baseball game that counts.* Another sign is that it lasts longer than one

game—it continues for several outings and your performance is inconsistent in these games. Other signs include:

- You dread having to make a certain throw, such as a short throw.
- You make a routine play and throw the ball into the dirt.
- You dread having to throw to second base for fear of giving up a base.
- You rush your throw because you can't stand the anxiety of it all.
- You over control or flinch during the release.
- You fear that you will embarrass yourself for making an error on an easy throw.
- You think others judge when you miss a routine throw during a game.
- You can't stop thinking about past throwing errors.

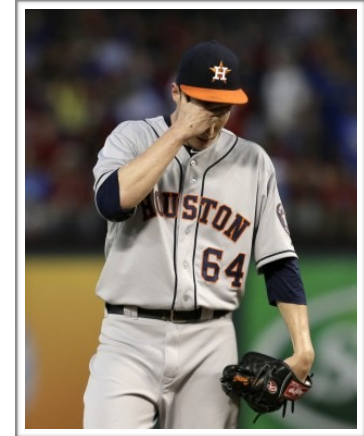
## How do you overcome the Yips Cycle?

Over the last 25 years, I've worked with many athletes who had the yips and I have been able to help them overcome the yips. However, you won't find **any quick tricks to beat the yips**. And I don't have any magic dust to sprinkle on your arm!



Overcoming the yips takes time and patience. Players with the yips don't seek help for months or years, as they often don't know they have a problem. This can make improvement more difficult. However, you can improve and break free of the yips cycle.

**Here's a good start...** I strongly suggest you avoid going to every coach or pitching instructor you can find in your area. What can make matters worse is when baseball players apply a physical solution to a mental game challenge. If you've changed your coach, worked on stance, modified your throwing mechanics, or made other changes, this can exacerbate the problem in many cases. Mental training often is the last resort after you have exhausted other options. ***You MUST simplify your throwing, not make it more complex!*** The more you think about how to throw, the worse it can get. So start by going back to what worked for you in the past and stick with one method, one simple method.



## 8 Mental Strategies to Beat the Yips

To break the yips cycle you have to address several related areas of your mental game. The bigger objective is to gain back your accuracy and freedom, but it's not always that simple



with players who have the yips. Let's start with making you aware of what mental strategies will help you break the yips cycle.

### 1. Managing your (and others') expectations about your performance.

The expectations you feel from others to perform well, such as the coach, teammates, and parents is part of the pressure you feel. When you focus on meeting others' expectations, you worry too much about results and outcomes. When you do this, you focus too much on NOT making bad throws and often try too hard to meet these expectations.



### 2. Learning to focus on the process instead of outcomes.

When you focus too much on outcomes during a game, such as making a bad throw and giving up a game-winning run, you become fearful of the “aftermath” of your error. A lot of fear is embedded in what others might think of you if you make an error from a bad throw. And many players don't want to be the scapegoat that costs the team a win.

### **3. Learn to throw intuitively and freely again.**

How did you throw a baseball when you were a kid? You looked at the target and let it go. I assume it's not that easy for you today. The ultimate goal is to get back to throwing like a kid again, but you have to understand that fear interferes with your trust. Throwing freely means trusting your mechanics and what you have done in practice. And one bad throw does not mean the game is a disaster or you will continue to make bad throws.



### **4. Regaining confidence so that you can make a good throw or pitch.**

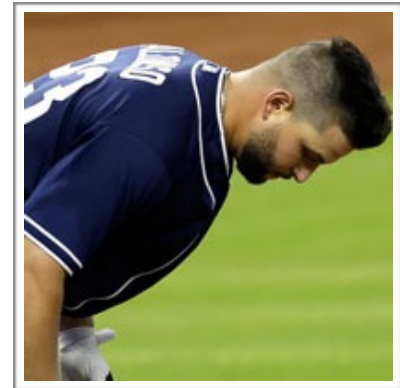
Regaining your confidence is key to throwing freely and accurately again. Confidence is when you believe you can hit the target and knowing you have the skills to make a good throw or pitch--and being able to trust all your pitches in a game. But confidence will only return when you learn to trust your throwing. The process to improve your confidence goes like this: overcome the fear, free up your throw to improve accuracy, and gain greater confidence in your throwing accuracy and speed.

### 5. **Playing baseball for the right reasons.**

Many ball players allow the fear of failure to drive their motivation for baseball. These players want to be good, but they also want others to think they are good. A big source of fear of failure comes from worrying about what others think, such as when you feel embarrassed for missing a routine throw to first base.

### 6. **Overcoming fear of embarrassment about poor results.**

Getting past the need of social approval and worrying about how others might judge you is often the underlying causes of fear of failure. You have to pinpoint what's so frustrating or upsetting about making a bad throw—and how others might view this. Thus, to throw or pitch freely you have to let go of the need to impress others or not disappointing others.



### 7. **Learning to have self-respect rather than have other respect.**

This strategy helps you play baseball for the right reasons and is the end point for 5 and 6 above. When you worry too much about what others think of your game, you look for other respect—or wanting others to approve of you. Instead, you want to have “self-

respect” for who you are as a person. Self-respect deals more with the person instead of the skills you have as a ball player. Self-confidence is about the belief in your skills. Self-respect is about how you feel about yourself as a person.



#### **8. Simplifying your pitching or throwing routine.**

When you are trapped in the yips cycle, you make throwing or pitching more complicated because you are always searching for fixes and how to work yourself out of the throwing blues. In reality, you want to simplify your approach to pitching and throwing by focusing more on the target and trusting your mechanics. However, this is hard to do when you are in a state of over control. Your mind wants to control your throw, but the body already knows how to throw. You interfere with a well-learned skill when you attempt to control your action.



## Summary

The weird part about the yips is the harder you try to make changes and think about how to make an accurate throw, *the more your control declines*. Overcoming the yips takes time and patience. However, you can improve and break free of the yips cycle. The yips cycle keeps players stuck in a cycle of poor throwing. When you have the yips, it's hard to regain confidence and trust in your throw.

To break free of the yips cycle, *you must simplify your throwing, not make it more complex!* The more you think about how to throw, the worse it can get. So start by going back to what worked for you in the past and stick with one method, one simple method. You also have to uncover the real fear and anxiety about missing throws that keep you stuck. In many cases, the fear is about negative social evaluation from others, such as what coaches, teammates, and parents think, keeps your stuck in the yips cycle.



## Mental Game Coaching for Baseball Yips

If you can throw freely and confidently in practice, but have trouble throwing accurately in games or the bull pen, you can benefit from mental coaching with Dr. Cohn. Master mental game coach Dr. Patrick Cohn can help you uncover the fears and mental blocks that keep you from performing up to your potential. You'll learn proven mental strategies Dr. Cohn uses to help baseball and softball players overcome the throwing yips and learn how to throw freely again. Contact Dr. Cohn today for more information on mental coaching for baseball.

### Contact Dr. Patrick Cohn

#### Beat Baseball Yips by Peak Performance Sports, LLC

7380 Sand Lake Rd. PMB 5012

Orlando, Florida 32819

407-909-1700 | 888-742-7225

[www.peaksports.com](http://www.peaksports.com) | Email: [mentalcoach@peaksports.com](mailto:mentalcoach@peaksports.com)

[www.baseball-yips.com](http://www.baseball-yips.com) - Beat Baseball Yips Website

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**Toll-Free 888-742-7225**