

Managing stress with mindful breathing

January 6 2017, by Mallory Powell

Stress is an inevitable part of life, but it can affect every organ system and cause negative impacts to your health. While we can't always eliminate our problems, we can learn to manage and relate to stress so that it doesn't cause so much suffering. Research shows that the regular practice of mindfulness can help you prevent or manage a range of stress-related symptoms, including pain, headache, emotional distress, poor sleep and digestive problems.

Mindful breathing is a portable mindfulness practice that is always available to you for the skillful, non-pharmacological management of stress. Even one minute of mindful breathing can restore a sense of mastery over your life.

Although mindfulness practices may allow reduction of some medications, these instructions are not meant to replace prescribed medication without consultation with your prescriber.

Instructions for Mindful Breathing

- Assume a comfortable position lying down, seated or reclining. Closing your eyes improves focus and reduces distractions.
- Allow your muscles to relax, especially the neck, shoulders, jaw, face, back and anywhere you are tense.
- Take a few deep breaths, paying attention to the physical sensation of breathing.
- Notice the pause at the end of the out-breath. Without prolonging that pause or thinking about it, experience its calmness, quietness

and peacefulness.

- Shifting your attention to your belly, allow your belly to be soft, rising with the in-breath and falling with the out-breath. A soft belly increases the movement of the diaphragm. This stimulates the parasympathetic ('rest and digest') impulses of the vagus nerve, which runs through the diaphragm, acting as an antidote to the sympathetic ('fight or flight') impulses of the stress response.
- Finally, simply feel the physical sensations of the breath in the nostrils, throat, chest and belly. Notice when the thinking mind wanders and, without judging yourself, simply return attention to feeling the breath.

To maximize the benefits of mindful breathing, practice 5-20 minutes once or twice daily. Practicing before meals may aid digestion. Taking just one mindful breath can re-connect you to the present moment, the only time in which you ever truly are alive. After your practice and throughout your day, be grateful for this inner resource and the gift you are giving yourself.

Mindful breathing is part of the eight week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course, offered January-March and March-May at Mind Body Studio in Lexington. UK Wellness offers a reduced rate for UK employees.

More information: www.mindbodystudy.org/

Provided by University of Kentucky

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