

Wellness At Work - Simple Habits For A Happy Workplace

June 2016 - Use Your Breath To Calm Yourself Down

Many of you may not be aware that one of the keys to triggering the relaxation response is quite literally right under your nose. Your breath is the doorway to an array of magical methods that enable you to trick your nervous system into flipping the switch from stress to calm. This month's habit sheet outlines a few simple exercises that can help you transform yourself from stressed to relaxed in just a few minutes.

A really easy way to check in and see where your stress levels are at is to count how many times you take a breath in a minute. The more breaths you take, the more likely it is that your stress response is activated and your cortisol levels are high. Use these simple techniques to trigger the relaxation response:



Many of us have forgotten how to breathe properly. The majority of people only breathe very shallowly in the upper chest as opposed to breathing consciously and filling the lungs completely. A very simple exercise is to stop what you're doing and focus on taking several long, slow, conscious inhalations in which you fill your lungs with awareness. To help you pay attention, place your hands around the sides of your ribs, feel them expand outwards as you start to inhale. As you continue the inhalation, feel your lungs fill from the bottom, through the middle and all the way to the top. Imagine that you are filling the very top portion of your lungs with air, right up under your collarbones. When your lungs are completely full, exhale just as slowly - try to do it in a way that the length of your exhale equals the length of your inhale.



One of the primary breathing exercises you can do to flip the switch from stress to relaxation is to breathe in a ratio of 1:2. That is, if you breathe in for a count of 5 seconds, then you need to exhale for a count of 10 seconds, that is you breathe in a ratio of 1:2. Make sure that the length of your exhale isn't so long that it is too challenging to do comfortably. That means you will have to take a short enough inhale to be able to exhale for twice as long without strain. If you do this one, simple exercise for a period of 3 to 5 minutes, you will notice an instant change in your stress levels and sense of wellbeing.



Another really simple way to transform your nervous system from one that's hyped up on cortisol and feeling out of control, to a much more relaxed state is by blocking your right nostril. Each nostril is connected to the opposite brain hemisphere. That is, the right nostril is connected to the left side of the brain that controls logic, reasoning and analysis. Conversely, the left nostril is connected to the right side of the brain that controls creativity, imagination and feelings. If you block your right nostril and only breathe through the left for approximately 5 minutes, you will switch into using the right side of your brain. This is a much more relaxed, calm, intuitive experience because it switches off the logic and reasoning part of ourselves that is always trying to figure things out and get things done.



If you would like to learn more about how to overcome stress using your breath try this book: [The Healing Power of the Breath: Simple Techniques to Reduce Stress and Anxiety, Enhance Concentration, and Balance Your Emotions.](#)

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