

Stress Management Breathwork Emphasis

Ultimately, it is necessary to learn how to manage stress. The bottom line is that chronic, unmanaged stress will make us sick, tired, wired, and worse. We will become less and less resilient to the normal challenges of day to day life with the long-term effects of stress.

Neuroplasticity is a relatively new understanding of how the brain works and how we learn. The basic idea behind neuroplasticity is that the more we perform a task, practice an instrument, learn a language, or practice a new skill the neuropathways that remember the activity get stronger and more effective. The phrase “neurons that fire together wire together,” based on the work of Donald Hebb and paraphrased by Carla Shatz, helps us to understand this occurrence.

The good news is that the brain can change itself if we are willing to set new habits into motion. As we consciously change our thinking and behavior, we can lessen the impact of stress and our reaction to it. Over time we can help our brain to change, to adapt to new responses, to replace old ingrained patterns of thinking and behaviors that were previously unconscious reflexes to life. Through self-awareness and dedicated stress management practices we have a chance to engage with the neuroplastic qualities of the brain to our best advantage.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Close one nostril and breathe in. Swap to close the opposite nostril and breathe out. Repeat. When you begin to salivate and your shoulders dip a bit you’ve turned on the parasympathetic nervous system or your “rest and digest” side. Bonus points if you implement 5 rounds before eating your meals. A great tool for kiddos.

4-7-8 Breathing Technique

There are many simple breathing techniques that help to calm the nervous system by inducing the parasympathetic or ‘rest and digest’ response. The 4-7-8 technique is one such breath.

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
2. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
5. This is one breath.

Buteyko or Pinched Nostril Breathing

The Buteyko Breathing Technique teaches you how to breathe properly through the nose (not the mouth) and with the diaphragm to improve nitric oxide and carbon dioxide levels in the body. When done properly, Buteyko breathing encourages the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, resulting in a reduction of blood pressure, a reduction of stress and the strengthening of the immune system. Here are the simple steps to perform this technique.

1. Normal Breath in Through the Nose: *Sit down in an upright posture and take a normal, calm breath through your nose. Do not take a deep breath.*
2. Normal Breath Out Through the Nose: *Exhale as you normally would through your nose. Use the diaphragm to push all air out of the lungs (stomach should move, chest should not).*
3. Shorter Breath In Through the Nose: *Now, take a shorter, more shallow and light (~1-2 seconds) inhalation through the nose and stop.*
4. Long Breath Out Through the Nose: *Slowly release the breath over 5 seconds, using your diaphragm to empty out your lungs. Hold breath after complete exhale for 5 seconds.*
5. Repeat Steps 1-4: *Take a normal, calm breath again through the nose (step 1), and repeat the entire process for several minutes.*

Re-framing

Re-framing is a way of viewing and experiencing what may be viewed as stressful events, ideas, concepts and emotions in a different way. It's not so much about what has happened, or is happening, as it is about how you choose to look at it.

[Watch this TED TALK by Kelley McGonigal on reframing stress.](#)