

WellnessAdvocate

Feeling Stressed? *just breathe.*



Feeling stressed (a close relative of feeling anxious) is hard to avoid in December. For most of us, the pace is hectic and it's easy to get overwhelmed. This month, our focus is on the power of deep breathing. It can reduce the amount of pressure and stress you may be feeling and will set the stage for a successful 2016!

BREATHING 101

Breathing exercises are a wonderfully effective way to reduce stress, regulate mood, and feel energized. One way to promote deeper breathing and better health is by exhaling completely. Try it: take a deep breath, let it out effortlessly, and then squeeze out a little more. Doing this regularly will help build up the muscles between your ribs, and your exhalations will naturally become deeper and longer. Start by practicing this exhalation exercise consciously, and eventually it will become a healthy, unconscious habit.

Dr. Andrew Weil is a world-renowned leader and pioneer in the field of integrative medicine—a healing oriented approach to healthcare that encompasses body, mind, and spirit. He notes that breathing strongly influences physiology and thought processes, including moods.

THE 4-7-8 BREATH

One breathing exercise Dr. Weil highly recommends is the 4-7-8 breath: [click here for a video example](#). It is simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning it. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward:

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.

BREATHING AS AN Rx

"If you train yourself to breathe a little bit slower, it can have long-term health benefits. Deep breathing activates a relaxation response, potentially decreasing inflammation, improving heart health, boosting your immune system and maybe even improving longevity," says Murali Doraiswamy, a professor of psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

Deep breathing also releases endorphins throughout the body. When practicing deep breathing, the upward and downward movement of the diaphragm helps remove toxins from the organs, promoting better blood flow.

In recent studies, techniques taught by knowledgeable pros have helped improve specific medical problems:

HEARTBURN. Training the diaphragm muscle with exercises used by singers reduced the amount of acid backing up into the esophagus and paid off with a 75% drop in medicine use, an Austrian study found.

PANIC ATTACKS. Exercises with slower, shallower breathing to counter the hyperventilation that occurs with panic episodes relieved the terrifying symptoms as effectively as cognitive therapy, recent research at Southern Methodist University in Dallas showed.

ASTHMA. In a Greek study, patients had fewer symptoms and their lung functioning was improved after just 12 sessions of breath retraining.

Of course, breathing is not the answer to every medical problem. But it's an effective tool for influencing individual health and well-being. And the best part is all of the ingredients are free!

4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; but the ratio of 4:7:8 is. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.
5. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
6. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.



Strength Training: Not Just for Body Builders

Despite its reputation as a "guy" or "jock" thing, strength training is a key component of overall health and fitness for everyone. Muscle mass naturally diminishes with age. "If you don't do anything to replace the lean muscle you lose, you'll increase the percentage of fat in your body," says Edward R. Laskowski, M.D., a physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn., and co-director of the Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine Center. "But strength training can help you preserve and enhance your muscle mass—at any age."

Benefits of Strength Training

Develops strong bones. By stressing your bones, strength training increases bone density.

Controls your weight. As you gain muscle, your body begins to burn calories more efficiently.

Boosts your stamina. As you get stronger, you won't fatigue as easily.

Manages chronic conditions. Strength training can reduce the signs and symptoms of many chronic conditions, including back pain, arthritis, obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Consider the Options

Strength training can be done at home or in the gym. Common choices include:

Using Your Body weight. You can do many exercises with little or no equipment. Try pushups, pullups, abdominal crunches and leg squats.

Resistance tubing. Resistance tubing is inexpensive, lightweight tubing that provides resistance when stretched. They're available in nearly any sporting goods store.

Free weights. Barbells and dumbbells are classic strength training tools.

Weight machines. Most fitness centers offer various resistance machines. You can also invest in weight machines for use at home.

You don't need to spend hours a day lifting weights to benefit from strength training. "Two to three strength training sessions a week lasting just 20 to 30 minutes are sufficient for most people," Dr. Laskowski says. Better yet, results are quick. Expect to enjoy noticeable improvements in your strength and stamina in just a few weeks. If you keep it up, you'll continue to increase your strength—even if you're not in shape when you begin.

(Article courtesy of Mayo Clinic)

Recipe: Winter Fruit Salad with Lemon Poppyseed Dressing

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons diced onion
- 1 teaspoon Dijon-style prepared mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds
- 1 head romaine lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
- 4 ounces shredded Swiss cheese
- 1 cup cashews
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 1 apple - peeled, cored and diced
- 1 pear - peeled, cored and sliced



Nutrition Information per serving: (Makes 12 servings | One serving = 1 cup)
277 calories | 21 g fat | 2 g dietary fiber | 12 g sugar | 5 g protein | 21 g carbohydrates | 193 mg potassium

Directions

1. In a blender or food processor, combine sugar, lemon juice, onion, mustard, and salt. Process until well blended. With machine still running, add oil in a slow, steady stream until mixture is thick and smooth. Add poppy seeds, and process just a few seconds more to mix.
2. In a large serving bowl, toss together the romaine lettuce, shredded Swiss cheese, cashews, dried cranberries, apple, and pear. Pour dressing over salad just before serving, and toss to coat.

(Recipe courtesy of Nora LaCroix | All Recipes)