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The following are simple exercises and advice for dealing with stress from Bev Clark, a very talented acupuncturist in Sedona, AZ. They are breathing exercises that can be done easily and make an enormous difference in your strength and health. We thank Bev for this contribution.

STRESS

As the fear has become quite palpable now, I encourage you to do whatever prayer and or meditation you might be drawn to. This is an opportunity for us to open to the love that we are and our powerful capacity to remain well, to heal, and to grow in compassion and kindness for our self and others in this challenging time.

When we focus on these, our immune system is stronger; we are happier and we help others in difficult moments. Radiating love to everyone and the world is important now. This is an amazing opportunity.

These practices also help us to maintain a center within so we are less caught in the fear and chaos cycle associated with the unknowns of this virus. This not only allows us to be more peaceful ourselves, it supports others around us to be less afraid and more caring, patient and kind.

These practices also help our immune system significantly. When we are in fear, our immune system quickly becomes depleted. And, our physical body, especially the parasympathetic nervous system isn't able to function well. It is this system that allows us to rest, digest our food and heal.

LUNGS

Lung exercises strengthen the lungs so they can be healthier and less vulnerable to a lung illness and more likely to recover faster.

Lung exercises are all breathing exercises. Some people already work with the breath in their meditation practices. If you have these in your life, I strongly encourage you to increase doing them.

To begin, in any breathing exercise, it is very important to "ground" our self. This allows us to get the most out of the breathing exercises and also improve our overall physical and mental health.

GROUNDING

If you aren't familiar with grounding, this is a simple way to do it, that many acupuncturists do.

1. Standing comfortably with your feet shoulder width apart and knees relaxed and slightly bent. Feel your feet on the floor. When we are anxious or stressed, all of our thoughts and emotions are up in our head. When we aren't grounded, it is easy to dissociate, have anxiety and not feel well
2. Once you feel your feet on the floor or earth, using your intention, send a line down your legs, out your feet and into the earth. Send this line to the opposite side of the earth.
3. Then, with your intention, send a line out the top of your head, up to the solar system and the universe. Feel this line go up.
4. Then, with your intention, send a third line from the sides of your chest out into the cosmos. Feel this line go out.

These three lines connect us with the pure energy of the earth, the universe and the cosmos. And we are then grounded in all three. From these three, our physical and mental health are supported and improved. We are 'connected', which in truth we always are. This is in contrast to feeling 'separate' - isolated, afraid, angry, and confused when we are not grounded.

The following are different ways to work with our breath. If you don't have a favorite breathing exercise.

BREATHING #1: BOTTLE BREATHING

This is called bottle breathing because it is like filling and then emptying a bottle. When we pour something into a bottle, the bottom fills first and the top of the bottle fills last. Then when we empty a bottle, the top empties first and the bottom empties last. Our lungs are the bottle. Bottle breathing is a type of meditation from the Tibetan Buddhist yogi tradition.

This is done in a very relaxed way. Focus gently on the filling and emptying of your lungs. If your mind wanders (which it will because that's what minds can do), just gently return your attention to the filling and emptying. Do this breathing exercise 2 or more times every day. I strongly recommend you do this more if you have a history of respiratory illnesses.

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight.
2. Give yourself permission for a few minutes to relax and be present with your body and your breathing. You can turn your attention back to the world later – if you want to.
3. Breathe in normally through your nose, allowing your abdomen to expand. This allows our diaphragm to drop so our lungs will be able to expand more. This fills the bottom of our bottle first.
4. As the lower part of your lungs fill, naturally allow your upper lungs to fill. This is the upper part of our bottle.
5. Breathe in until you are just comfortable, with no excess pressure in your chest or abdomen.
6. Pause for a short time when you have comfortably filled your lungs. This is not 'holding your breath'. Just a pause as the cycle turns around to empty.
7. Now exhale gently and normally through your mouth with lips relaxed and slightly open. This will be natural and not gasping for another breath.
8. Imagine the air in the top of your lungs is leaving first. And the air in the bottom of your lungs leaves last.

9. Start with 10-15 repetitions. When this is comfortable, do 25 repetitions.
Slowly increase the number of repetitions over time.

The exhale should be slightly longer than the inhale. Start slowly. Consider counting during the inhale and exhale. Perhaps count to 3 or 5 on the inhale and 5 or 7 on the exhale. Each person will be able to do the inhale and exhale for different lengths of time depending on their lung history. See what works for you. Increase the counts slowly over time.

BREATHING #2: QIGONG FOR HEALTH AND BREATHING

Qigong supports the immune system, cultivates Qi and can be a cardio exercise.

This is a short, 6-minute clip of Andrew Serman teaching a Qigong routine. In addition to doing and teaching qigong, Andrew is one of the foremost scholars on Chinese Medicine nutrition for health and healing. I have studied specific acupuncture with Andrew's wife, Ann Cecil-Serman.

https://vimeo.com/396940367?mc_cid=20e3ab2826&mc_eid=968248f524

BREATHING #3: MEDICAL BREATHING

This is similar to A, the bottle breathing. But this exercise is done with pursed lips as one exhales, so there is pressure in the lungs. It isn't intended to also be a meditation with all the added benefits of calming that the bottle breathing provides. This exercise is prescribed by doctors following a serious lung illness such as pneumonia or lung surgery and can be done to increase the capacity and health of our lungs. Typically, this exercise is done with an instrument. To build lung capacity the instrument is not needed. The capacity is built through having pursed lips.

1. Sit comfortably.

2. Close your mouth and have your lips comfortably closed.
3. Inhale slowly through your nose, to a count of 3 or 5. As you inhale, allow your abdomen to fill and rise first and your lungs last. Notice how much your lungs fill. Remember this in the days to come so you have a base line to grow from.
4. Hold for a count of 5.
5. Exhale slowly through your pursed lips to a count of 7. With your lips lightly closed as you exhale through your mouth, this creates some pressure in your lungs. In a way, this is like lifting weights for the lungs.
6. Rest for a few seconds and then repeat 3 through 5.
7. Begin with a set of three. Slowly, build up to a set of 10. Consider doing this twice a day at least.

If you have a history of respiratory conditions or smoke, I strongly encourage you to do it at least three times a day while the pandemic is with us.

--Bev Clark