

Hello,

Our theme for August was resiliency. Each week we learned handy resources you can use on your own for self-care. As promised here are resources' instructions. Please feel free to print them out, perhaps all of them or just one or two, and put them on your home meditation space or carry in your wallet or purse to have handy if you find yourself in a moment where you need a bit of calming and centering.

There is no "correct" or perfect meditation posture. Everyone's body is different, and everyone will have a slightly different favorite meditation posture. Whether it's sitting on a cushion on the floor, in a chair or lying down; they're all OK.

The ideal meditation posture is one where you are using the least amount of effort to maintain it, your breathing is unrestricted and easy, and you are comfortable and warm. A posture where you can be completely still, completely relaxed and completely alert.

Sometimes resting your hands on a small pillow or folded blanket in your lap can really help relax your arms shoulders and neck. And, if you're lying down, putting a pillow under your knees. If you're cold, cover your legs and hips with a blanket.

Meditation is not a torture or endurance test. Always be sensitive and aware of your body's pain sensations. Some pains can be warning signs. Pins and needles or numbness for example should not be ignored. If at any time you feel pain or discomfort, it's OK to shift and move to a new position but do so mindfully, slowly and intentionally. Make moving your body part of the meditation, being aware of your body's sensations and the movement, rather than moving reflexively.

"The perfect breath is this: Breathe in for about 5.5 seconds, then exhale for 5.5 seconds. That's 5.5 breaths a minute for a total of about 5.5 liters of air."

I highly recommend the new book "Breath" by James Nestor. All quotes in this email from "Breath."

The summary of the book is that breathing through your nose is good and breathing through your mouth is bad. Nose breathing conditions the air by moistening, warming, filtering, and adding nitric oxide, a molecule that plays an essential role in increasing circulation and delivering oxygen into cells. Nasal breathing alone can boost nitric oxide six-fold, which is one of the reasons we can absorb about 18 percent more oxygen than by just breathing through the mouth.

Three-Part Breathing – Yoga Pranayama Breathing

PHASE I – breaking it down

- Sit in a chair or cross-legged and upright on the floor and relax the shoulders.
- Place one hand over the navel and slowly breathe into the belly. You should feel the belly expand with each breath in, deflate with each breath out. Practice this a few times.

- Next, move the hand up a few inches so that it's covering the bottom of the rib cage. Focus the breath into the location of the hand, expanding the ribs with each inhale, retracting them with each exhale. Practice this for about three to five breaths.
- Move the hand to just below the collarbone. Breathe deeply into this area and imagine the chest spreading out and withdrawing with each exhale. Do this for a few breaths.

PHASE II – putting it all together

- Placing one hand on the navel and the other over the heart
- Connect all these motions into one breath, inhaling into the belly, lower rib cage, then chest.
- Exhale in the opposite direction, first emptying the chest, then the rib cage, then the belly.
- Continue this same sequence for about a dozen rounds.

6 Count Breathing or Resonant Coherent Breathing

“A calming practice that places the heart, lungs, and circulation into a state of coherence, where the systems of the body are working at peak efficiency. There is no more essential technique, and none more basic.”

- Sit up straight, relax the shoulders and belly, and exhale.
- Inhale softly counting to 6, expanding the belly as air fills the bottom of the lungs.
- Without pausing, exhale softly counting to 6, bringing the belly in as the lungs empty.
- Each breath should feel like a circle.
- Repeat at least ten times, more if possible.

Chanting (Humming)

“Nitric oxide is a powerhouse molecule that widens capillaries, increases oxygenation, and relaxes the smooth muscles. Humming increases the release of nitric oxide in the nasal passages 15-fold. There is the most effective, and simple, method for increasing this essential gas.”

This is a great description of one of the physiological benefits of chanting. Each of the consonants in the mantra Namu Myoho Renge Kyo vocalize as a hum sound.

- Breathe normally through the nose and from your belly, hum Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo.
- Practice for at least five minutes a day, more if possible.

Box Breathing

This technique great to stay calm and focused in tense situations. It's simple.

- Inhale to a count of 4; hold 4; exhale 4; hold 4. Repeat.

Longer exhalations will elicit a stronger parasympathetic response. A variation of Box Breathing to more deeply relax the body that's especially effective before sleeping is as follows:

- Inhale to a count of 4; hold 4; exhale 6; hold 2. Repeat.

Try at least six rounds, more if necessary.

Body Scan

A great calming practice to bring your thoughts back into your body and ground yourself.

- Lie down
- Bring your awareness to your breath using one of the breathing techniques we learned that you like.
- Starting at your feet, slowly moving all the way up your body to head, imagine you are shining a flashlight onto yourself focused on the body part you are thinking about.
- Spend a few breaths thinking about that body part and feeling whatever sensation is there, without judgment or trying to change it.
- Move to next body part.
- You can start with larger sections such as "feet," "legs," "Belly," "chest," "arms," "head..."
- When you have 'scanned' your body try and hold your whole body's sensations in your mind at once for a few breaths.
- Finish with bringing your awareness back to breathing
- Open your eyes and sit up slowly and gradually.

Autogenic and Biofeedback Therapy

Autogenic just means "self-generating." It's another form of body-scan awareness meditation that is really simple to learn and do anywhere. These are phrases designed to give gentle instructions to our autonomic nervous system. They "tell" your vagus nerve to do its job of quieting and calming.

- My arms are heavy and warm. [pause]... I am at peace.
- My legs are heavy and warm. [pause]... I am at peace.
- My heartbeat is calm and regular. [pause]... I am at peace.
- My belly radiates warmth. [pause]... I am at peace.
- My forehead is cool. [pause]... I am at peace.
- My breathing is calm and regular. [pause]... I am at peace.

Repeat each phrase up to six times.

Three Step Reset

This short meditation takes less than 3 minutes, and is really useful whenever you feel off balance, agitated, stressed and generally out-of-sorts. You can do it anywhere, anytime. In-line at the grocery

store, during a work Zoom call, even if you're having a heated discussion with a partner or friend. Giving yourself a short time out to reset.

You can use the mnemonic "**AGE**" to help you remember the steps.

Begin with a definitive change in your posture, so it embodies a sense of being awake. Standing taller or sitting a bit straighter. Perhaps closing the eyes if that's possible...

Step one, **Awareness**: checking in with what's going on in your mind and body right now. What's the weather pattern like inside... What thoughts are around... What feelings are here... What sensations are in the body... Not trying to change anything but opening to what's already here...

Step two, **Gathering** yourself: bringing your attention to the sensations of the breath in the abdomen. Tuning in to the physical sensations of each inbreath for its full duration and each outbreath for its full duration... And if the mind wanders simply acknowledging where it went and gently escorting it back to the breath...

Step three, **Expanding** your awareness around the breath to take in the whole body. As if the whole body were breathing now... Aware of your posture... Your facial expression... Sensations on surface of the skin and from right inside the body... Holding in awareness all the sensations in your body right now just as they are... Coming home to the body... Coming home to this moment...

Anapanasati Mindfulness of Breath Meditation:

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. In.
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out. Out.

Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Aware of body.
Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body. Aware of body.

Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Calming body.
Breathing out, I calm my whole body. Calming body.

Breathing in, I feel joyful. Feeling joyful.
Breathing out, I feel joyful. Feeling joyful.

Breathing in, I feel happy. Feeling happy.
Breathing out, I feel happy. Feeling happy.

Breathing in, I am aware of my thoughts and emotions. Thoughts and emotions.
Breathing out, I am aware of my thoughts and emotions. Thoughts and emotions.

Breathing in, I calm my thoughts and emotions. Calming thoughts and emotions.
Breathing out, I calm my thoughts and emotions. Calming thoughts and emotions.

Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Aware of Mind.
Breathing out, I am aware of my mind. Aware of Mind.

Breathing in, I ease my mind. Easing my mind.
Breathing out, I ease my mind. Easing my mind.

Breathing in, I concentrate my mind. Concentrating my mind.
Breathing out, I concentrate my mind. Concentrating my mind.

Breathing in, I liberate my mind. Liberating my mind.
Breathing out, I liberate my mind. Liberating my mind.

Breathing in, I observe the impermanent nature of all things. Impermanence.
Breathing out, I observe the impermanent nature of all things. Impermanence.

Breathing in, I observe the fading of craving. Fading of craving.
Breathing out, I observe the fading of craving. Fading of craving.

Breathing in, I observe cessation. Cessation.
Breathing out, I observe cessation. Cessation.

Breathing in, I observe letting go of debilitating attachments. Letting go.
Breathing out, I observe letting go of debilitating attachments. Letting go.

(Going through these 16 verses silently saying each phrase in your mind one time takes about 4 minutes.
Twice is about 8 minutes. Etc. It's actually a really neat meditation timer!)

Dune Litany to relieve Fear:

I will not fear.
Fear is the mind-killer.
Fear is the little-death.
I will face my fear.
I will allow it to pass over me and through me.
And when it has gone past, I turn my inner eye and observe it's gone.
Only I remain.

(Do a 2 - 3 cycles of 6 Count Breathing then read this to yourself.)

May you all be happy
May you all be well
May you all be safe
May you all be peaceful and at ease.

Warm regards,

Mark