

GUIDED MEDITATION 2: ACCOMPANYING HANDOUT

GETTING THROUGH THE DAY: Breath and flexibility

HOW TO CALM YOUR BODY AND MIND IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Here are some methods to restore a sense of safety and calm in the body/mind that are free and accessible to you anytime of day.

BREATH

A breath that is rapid and in the upper part of your chest can trigger your sympathetic nervous system or "fight or flight". If you find yourself doing this type of tight, restricted, rapid, or shallow breathing, try one of these activities to bring calm back to your mind.

- Shake and stretch your body especially around your torso, chest, ribcage, and back muscles. You are literally creating more space to be able to receive a deeper and fuller breath.
- Lie down and place your hands on your stomach. Keep your chest lifted the entire time while you allow your belly to be the part of your body that rises and falls on your breath. This can help re-engage your diaphragm muscle.
- Exhale every last drop of breath. This constricts your internal muscles and works your lungs so that on the inhale they are able to expand and receive a deeper breath.
- Count your breath in a rhythmic cycle for 1-5 minutes. Inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 6, hold for 2, repeat.

A calming breath will work it's magic in your nervous system. For more science on the body's parasympathetic nervous system check out: <https://www.kenhub.com/en/library/anatomy/the-parasympathetic-nervous-system>

BODY

Your body is a beautiful container and your ally through life. Thinking of your body in kind, positive, and loving ways can be difficult since it can also be the source of physical pain and judgment from ourselves and others. Try these ways of building up a loving relationship with your body so that you have access to it's support in difficult times.

Self-soothing touch is one way of positively influencing the sophisticated relationship between your body, mind, and emotions. While taking deep breaths, try gently stroking up and down the length of your arm. Allow your intention to be one of kindness. Treat your body as if it was an innocent and loving child in need of care.

"Research shows that touch can communicate *multiple* positive emotions: joy, love, gratitude, and sympathy. Scientists used to believe touching was simply a means of enhancing messages signaled through speech or body language, "but it seems instead that touch is a much more nuanced, sophisticated, and precise way to communicate emotions."

Article by Rick Chillot <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201303/the-power-touch>

In our new world where touch from others is more socially distanced, it is our responsibility to provide nourishing touch to ourselves.

VOICE

Using your voice by singing, speaking, or simply making sounds is actually a very effective ways to restore calm in your body and mind. The anatomy of your voice directly stimulate the vagus nerve which is a main factor in activating your parasympathetic nervous system.

The next time you feel overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed, try humming. Bring your attention to how the hum *feels* as opposed to how it sounds. This incredibly simple tool actually creates a complex reaction in your body and mind. The vibration of your hum gives an internal massage to muscles of jaw and tongue while also loosening any gunk in the cavities of your sinuses. Humming also is very healthy for your throat creating a "semi occluded vocal tract" which allows for a more relaxed use of your vocal folds and a gentle flow of air through your throat. Humming also stimulates your vagus nerve and allows your ears to hear the sound of your voice, both of which are incredibly calming to your mind and body.

"Increasing your vagal tone activates the parasympathetic nervous system, and having higher vagal tone means that your body can relax faster after stress. In 2010, researchers discovered a positive feedback loop between high vagal tone, positive emotions, and good physical health. In other words, the more you increase your vagal tone, the more your physical and mental health will improve, and vice versa."

By Jordan Fallis <https://www.optimallivingdynamics.com/blog/how-to-stimulate-your-vagus-nerve-for-better-mental-health-brain-vns-ways-treatment-activate-natural-foods-depression-anxiety-stress-heart-rate-variability-yoga-massage-vagal-tone-dysfunction?rq=vagus%20nerve>