



mindful hub

well-being, right now.

Breathe Your Way to Happiness on and off the Job

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. When trying to decrease job stress it's important to distinguish between **work conditions** and **worker characteristics**. Work conditions include physical setting and job design. If work conditions are the cause of your stress, you will need to have conversations with coworkers and supervisors to try to decrease your stress. On the other hand, everyone has a unique way of handling stress. For this reason it is important to consider your individual characteristics as a coworker and a person. This involves self-exploration to determine your patterns of reacting to stress and learning ways to manage stress on and off the job.

The Effect of continuous stress

All human bodies respond to stress in the same way. Stress sets off an alarm in the brain, sometimes called the “**fight or flight response**” which responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The **sympathetic nervous system** is aroused and hormones like **cortisol** and **adrenaline** are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, and tense the muscles. **This response happens whether is real or imagined.** Problems occur when this stress reaction happens to us frequently every day and periodic stress becomes **chronic stress**. When the body is constantly bombarded with stress hormones we run the risk of developing conditions like sleep disorders, depression, and chronic conditions like chronic fatigue, hyperglycemia and heart disease. **Stress can prematurely age us.** How we respond to chronic stress – going for a walk as opposed to smoking – will ultimately slow down or speed up the aging process.

The Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation and Conscious Breathing

Fortunately we have some simple and free tools at our disposal to help us counter the stress response – **breathing and mindfulness – which can be practiced anywhere.** When we access the **relaxation response** the **parasympathetic nervous system** kicks in and we experience what is sometimes known as the “**rest and digest**” response. Blood pressure decreases, your heart beats slower, and gastric juices are released so that your body can digest and absorb the maximum amount of nutrition available in food. In recent years there has been a large body of research produced on the benefits of mindfulness meditation. We know now that Mindfulness practices can reduce blood pressure, and help individuals recovering from heart disease and depression. More research is appearing every day. The latest research looks at the connection between mindfulness and a greater occurrence of positive emotion.

Mindful Breathing

Mindfulness practices help achieve moment to moment awareness in a non-judgmental, detached way, thereby decreasing the amount of time per day spent in “fight or flight” mode. **Attention to the breath is one of the best ways to access mindfulness.** Breathing is one of the few bodily functions that can be controlled both consciously and unconsciously. Conscious attention to breathing is common in many forms of meditation and is used by top athletes to enhance your performance. Why not start treating yourself like a top athlete and try this peak performance tool?

A Simple Five-Minute Breath Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position either on a chair or on a floor with your legs comfortably crossed. Sit tall with your spine extended so that your breath can enter your entire torso. Relax your shoulders down and move your shoulder blades towards each other. Place one hand on your abdomen and the other above your chest near your collar bone. Inhale deeply from the bottom of your abdomen. Feel the expansion pressing against your hand. Continue to fill your torso until you feel the hand on your upper chest expand. Hold the breath for one second, and then release the breath from the chest to the abdomen. Picture a cup of water emptying from the top to the bottom. Hold the breath at the bottom for two seconds, then repeat this long, slow even breath nine more times. When you have finished, remain sitting for five minutes or more. It may help to use some sort of timer when you are first practicing this technique.

Practicing this exercise will have a cumulative affect on your well-being by increasing your ability to manage stress.