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PINCH OF WISDOM

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This simple practice can have a huge impact on your health

The act of mindful breathing has been practiced for thousands of years amongst Eastern cultures to restore or enhance health. This slow, mindful breath is an overlooked practice that affects every single aspect of your health. In this article, we're going to discuss your breath and its powerful role in taking you from "fight-or-flight" to "rest-and-digest". We'll discuss how deep breathing can be a powerful tool for managing stress, reducing anxiety, improving digestion, and finding your inner calm (among many other benefits).

The autonomic nervous system plays a crucial role in the maintenance of homeostasis yet functions without conscious, voluntary control. There are two divisions of the autonomic nervous system in the body: sympathetic and parasympathetic. Each of these systems are dominant under certain conditions.

PINCH OF SALT

NUTRITIONAL
THERAPY
PRACTICE

The sympathetic division forms the “fight-or-flight” response to an emergency or stressful situation. The overall effect of the sympathetic system under these conditions is to prepare the body for strenuous physical activity. More specifically, sympathetic nervous activity will increase the flow of blood that is well-oxygenated and rich in nutrients to the tissues that need it, in particular, the working skeletal muscles.

The parasympathetic division forms the body’s “rest-and-digest” response when the body is relaxed, resting, or feeding. The parasympathetic works to undo the work of the sympathetic division after a stressful situation. Among other functions, the parasympathetic division works to decrease respiration and heart rate, increase digestion, and permit the elimination of wastes.

**Sympathetic = “fight-or-flight”
Parasympathetic = “rest-and-digest”
These two play a crucial role in the maintenance of homeostasis**

The amount of stress we’re under and how we control that stress will determine which branch is firing most often. With a pandemic, homeschooling, working from home, financial struggles, social media, air pollution, water pollution, plastics everywhere, and a food-system that pushes processed Frankenfoods leaving many malnourished, the majority of us are in a constant state of “fight-or-flight”. This sympathetic dominance creates an overall imbalance in our bodies, affecting all non-emergency processes, such as digestion, detoxification, and sleep.

Here is where voluntary and conscious behavior comes into play. Mindful, slow breathing can be a potent and pivotal practice to toggle your nervous system from sympathetic to parasympathetic. This conscious breath will bring your body into balance, permitting digestion, detoxification, repair, and relaxation.



Mindful breathing calls for a focus on your breath. It encourages the shift from short, shallow chest breathing to deep belly breathing with a slow inhale and extended exhale. There are many different mindful breathing techniques and strategies, and I encourage you to explore the type of slow breath that works best for you. One helpful strategy is to take the 5, 6, 7 approach. Before you begin eating, when you're feeling tense, or anytime you'd like to further relax, try inhaling for a count of 5, holding your breath for a count of 6, and slowly exhaling for a count of 7. Repeat five times or until you feel yourself relaxing.

Slow, mindful breathing is a simple yet powerful practice that will encourage your body to find balance and function optimally. Our breath is a potent tool to support the parasympathetic nervous system and many vital functions within the body. As an act of self-love and self-healing, be sure to find time each day to come back to your breath.

SOURCES

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