

BREATHING & MINDFULNESS

Practices for a calm and clear mind



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Finding a place of health and wellness is in large part dependent on our nutrition, movement, and sleep. There is another aspect that many overlook. Social and mental well-being is no doubt the fourth pillar of our health.

There are endless ways to find quality relationships and mental well-being. These can come from close family and friends, satisfaction with your occupation, breathing practices, religious practices, and mindfulness or meditation practices. The biggest challenge is finding a sense of well-being in your mind.

Looking within ourselves

Often when we think about being happy we are focused on material objects or experiences. Many people live their life waiting to have enough money to buy a new car or take a vacation hoping that these things will bring them happiness. And for a moment or while the experience lasts you will find some happiness, however, as we all know it is short-lived.

So what is the key to finding long-term happiness and satisfaction? I'm not sure anyone can say they know for certain but I have a few ideas.

- Having quality relationships with humans you love and respect
- Having a passion and purpose in your life
- Taking time to practice introspection and grow yourself (mentally and physically)
- Learning new and exciting things

Everything above has one common requirement for success. Investment in yourself and your growth as a human. If you aren't striving to be the best person you can be for yourself then it will be difficult for you to be that person for others. This will lead to relationships that lack depth and importance. It will also lead you to get stuck in a rut where you lose passion and purpose, you stop making the time to focus on yourself and develop your mind.

Introspection is the definition of looking within ourselves physically, mentally, and emotionally. In my opinion, it is the most unrepresented aspect of our health.

To be introspective we must be mindful of everything that is happening within us, within others, and within our environment. If you can notice the negative thoughts you are having and what they are doing to you you can begin to correct them. If you notice that others are frustrated or responding to you poorly you can modify your behavior to help them. The key is being aware and introspective of the moment these thoughts and emotions arise. This is developed through time of being consistent with breathing and mindfulness practices. If this is properly developed you will have the energy and focus to strive for long-term happiness and satisfaction.

My Introspective Experience

As an adolescent, I spent most of my time easily angered, with little emotional control, and no understanding of how my words affected others. At the time I had no idea that I could control or vastly eliminate these behaviors. Instead, I blamed my emotional states and reactions on the way others spoke to me. There was no understanding of how much these behaviors were stunting my growth and happiness.

During my time as an undergraduate student, I spent most of my time in isolation. I was the only person from my high school that went to Michigan State and I wasn't very good at getting out of my comfort zone to make friends. This forced me to spend most of my time in my head.

I spent all of my time learning and observing myself and others. I was constantly listening to audiobooks and podcasts which lead me to stumble upon books on mindfulness and meditation.

Once I adopted the practices I will describe below, spent time analyzing the way I communicate with myself and others, and learning more than I could have ever imagined about health, fitness, psychology, and human beings.

There is a clear distinction in my mind between the person I was before these experiences and the person I am today. It has left me striving to be a better version of myself every day. My goal every year is to be able to crush the person I was this time last year.

Breathwork Mindfulness & Meditation

Every human is different in their needs and beliefs when it comes to developing practices that calm your mind and change your perspective of yourself and those around you.

There are a few things that science has proven to work.

- Conscious and controlled breathing reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as improves cognition (focus) and a sense of well-being.
- Periods of introspection utilizing breathwork, mindfulness, or meditation change neural circuitry in our brains. This allows us to have a better sense of control over our thoughts and emotions while learning to be more connected to the present moment.
- Improvements in decision-making and responses to perceived negative stimuli.

Below I will describe what an optimal day looks like for me. You will have to experiment and find practices that work best for you in your life.

Daily Breathing

- 5-10 minutes of various breathing protocols.
- Box Breathing: 5-second inhale - 5-second pause - 5-second exhale - 5-second pause
- Horizontal breathing : 3 seconds inhale - 1-second pause - 6 seconds exhale

These are only two of the main styles I utilize. There are many more practices that also have great benefits.

Daily Mindfulness/Meditation

- 10 minutes of guided meditation via apps such as Waking Up, Calm, or Headspace

My suggestion for starting a meditation practice would be to use guided meditation. This is a very tricky practice that takes months if not years to develop and having someone there to guide you through your practice will be a game-changer.

Take-Home Message

Learning to be more introspective will improve your relationships, your sense of well-being, and more importantly will teach you to be calm and controlled with whatever life throws at you.

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