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PERFORMANCE THERAPY

Meditation Practices

1. Breath Focus

- In this simple, powerful technique, you take long, slow, deep, cleansing breaths (also known as abdominal or belly breathing). As you breathe, you gently disengage your mind from distracting thoughts and sensations.
- Shallow breathing limits the amount of oxygen we take in and when we are stressed our breathing becomes even shallower. This makes us feel more tense and anxious.
- Hyperventilation accompanies most panic attacks. The body thinks it doesn't have enough oxygen when in reality hyperventilating means that the body is taking in too much oxygen. This is why many people with anxiety feel light headed, dizzy, have chest pains, sweat more, feel tired and short of breath. By making sure you are breathing correctly it restores balance to your oxygen and carbon dioxide levels and decreases anxiousness.
- If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.
- *Repetitive mantra/prayer*
 - i. For this technique, you silently repeat a short mantra or prayer while practicing breath focus. This method may be especially appealing if religion or spirituality is meaningful to you.
 - "I'm wasting my energy by becoming upset/angry."
 - "As long as I stay calm, I am in control of myself"
 - "It doesn't matter what other people say about me, I'm not going to doubt myself."
 - "The only person I can control in this situation is myself."
 - "I have permission/the power to change my mind."
 - "I forgive myself for my past mistakes."
 - "Fear is only a feeling that can't hold me back."
 - "I'm proud of myself for trying."



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2. Body Scan

- By mentally scanning yourself from head to toe — many people imagine a laser copier scanning the length of their body — you are bringing awareness to every single part of your body, noticing any aches, pains, tension, or general discomfort.
- Staying present with and breathing into these sensations can help bring relief to our minds and bodies by evolving our relationship to pain, aches, and discomfort.

3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) - *contact MD prior**

- PMR involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body.
- Frequently we are unaware that we are holding our bodies in tension until it becomes very painful.
- With regular practice, PMR gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body.
- This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind.

4. Guided Imagery / Visualization

- For this technique, you think of soothing scenes, places, or experiences in your mind to help you relax and focus. You will employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. You can find free apps and online recordings of calming scenes—just make sure to choose imagery you find soothing and that has personal significance.
- *Guided imagery may help you reinforce a positive vision of yourself, but it can be difficult for those who have intrusive thoughts or find it hard to conjure up mental images.*
- Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal.
 - i. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.
- You can significantly reduce stress with something enormously powerful: your imagination. Everybody visualizes. Daydreams, memories, and self-talk are all types of visualization.
- Visualization is effective in treating many stress-related and physical illnesses, including headaches, muscle spasms, chronic pain, and general or situation-specific anxiety.



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5. Mindfulness Meditation

- This practice involves sitting comfortably, focusing on your breathing, and bringing your mind's attention to the present moment without drifting into concerns about the past or the future.
- Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external.
- Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming.
 - i. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance.
- Research suggests it may be helpful for people with anxiety, depression, and pain.
- You are just exploring the sensations or images you choose to focus on, and noticing what happens physically, emotionally and mentally.
 - i. As you improve your practice, you will be more mindful and present in your daily life and have better awareness of the thoughts that may be contributing to your emotional distress.

6. Yoga, Tai Chi, and Qigong

- These three ancient arts combine rhythmic breathing with a series of postures or flowing movements. The physical aspects of these practices offer a mental focus that can help distract you from racing thoughts.
- Yoga involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. As well as reducing anxiety and stress, yoga can also improve flexibility, strength, balance, and stamina.
- Physiological and psychological stress (Marshall et al., 2020; Wang & Szabo, 2020)
- PTSD symptoms in veterans (Cushing & Braun, 2018; Elwy et al., 2014; Seppala et al., 2014; Staples et al., 2013)
- Occupational stress injuries in first responders (Antony et al., 2020; Jeter et al., 2013; Thompson & Drew, 2020).



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7. Rhythmic Exercise (running, walking, rowing, or cycling)

- Most effective at relieving stress when performed with relaxation in mind.
- As you exercise, focus on the physicality of your body's movement and how your breathing complements that movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement.
- If walking or running, for example, focus on each step—the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breath while moving, and the feeling of the wind against your face.
- *Note: overexercising can induce a chronic low stress inflammation, which can negatively impact testosterone levels.*

8. Grounding

- Grounding is a self-soothing skill to use when you are having a bad day or dealing with a lot of stress, overwhelming feelings, and/or intense anxiety.
- Grounding is a technique that helps keep you in the present and helps reorient you to the here-and-now and to reality.
 - i. Feet on the floor
 - ii. Sit with your feet on the floor.
 - iii. Take notice as you push each toe into the floor.
 - iv. Push your heels into the floor.
 - **3-3-3 Method**
 - a. Name 3 sounds
 - b. Move 3 body parts
 - c. Point out 3 things you can see

9. Optimism

- Higher levels of anger (+aggression) predict early heart disease while optimists have fewer heart attacks, strokes, and tend to live longer.
- Research supports the effects that a positive outlook has on overall health and the ability to recover from illness and injury.
- Constantly focusing on negative thoughts, what makes you angry, or anxious puts you in a continuous state of fight or flight.
- High cortisol levels = high blood sugar and a suppressed immune system.
- Focusing on what brings you joy promotes oxytocin and changes your outlook.