



Scotland Massage Therapy

Stress Relief Through Breath

When stressed or in pain, most people hold their breath or take fast, shallow breaths from the chest only. This reliance on breathing only from the top of the lungs, or “apical breathing”, actually contributes to neck and upper back pain, minimizes oxygen in the body and perpetuates the vicious cycle of stress. Chest breathing puts a strain on the neck and upper back muscles including the scalenes and upper trapezius because they are attached to the ribs and collar bone, helping lift the rib cage during inhalation. These muscles get over used with apical breathing. Deep Diaphragmatic Breathing (DDB) can be practiced several times a day in order to develop proper breathing techniques and reduce stress. Lying down, or sitting, place one hand on your abdomen taking a deep breath all the way down through the belly area only, and exhale. Only your stomach should inflate like a balloon. Next place a hand on each side of your rib cage and concentrate on expanding this area when taking a big breath in. Now place a hand on your sternum or breast bone and have this area lift when you are inhaling. The last step is taking all three of these breaths and combining into one: take a deep breath in, expanding your stomach, ribs then chest in that order, hold for several seconds and slowly exhale. Repeat 6-8 times. Stop immediately if you start to become light headed. These should be slow, deep breaths. You can do this several times a day but do not do more than one set at a time to prevent dizziness. Do not perform DDB if you have long-term diabetes or kidney disease. This type of breathing increases relaxation, lymphatic flow and efficiency of gas exchange, is useful during stretching and decreases pain and stress. It is also useful to quiet your mind and body prior to falling asleep. Practice it when you are relaxed so you can easily use it during times of stress.

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