MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

Breathing 101

Breathing is something you do all the time, often with little or no thought. Even during times of stress, your breathing will typically unconsciously shorten. Learning to control your breathing can be an essential tool for improving your mental and physical health.

Breathwork, which is known as the combination of breathing exercises and mindfulness practices, can improve mood and focus, increase relaxation, boost sleep quality, and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and grief. This practice can also lower blood pressure, reduce asthma symptoms and help with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease symptoms.

Breathing Exercises

Various breathwork exercises could be right for you, such as the following:

- **4-7-8 breathing** involves inhaling for four seconds, holding your breath for seven seconds and exhaling for eight seconds.
- **Box or square breathing** involves four steps, each lasting four seconds. You inhale, hold your breath, exhale and hold your breath again, repeating the process. This exercise is most effective when you breathe entirely through your nose.
- **Bellows breathing** can help you wake up when you're feeling tired. Begin by making loose fists with your hands and holding them by your shoulders, with your elbows at your ribs. Next, inhale through your nose as you press your fists toward the sky. Quickly exhale as you bring your hands back to their starting position.

Like any skill, it's important to practice. Experiment with different breathing techniques and having your eyes open and closed.

Conclusion

Breathwork is a free and low-risk activity you can try at home to boost your mental and physical health. If you're having trouble getting started, consult a certified breathwork practitioner or download a mindfulness app.

The Power of Affirmations

Affirmations are a type of positive self-talk that can promote internal change and self-love while reducing anxiety, doubt, worry and fear. You can alter your subconscious thoughts by repeating these supportive and encouraging phrases. Furthermore, believing these positive statements will make you more likely to act in ways that reinforce self-love, which can help turn these positive statements into reality.

Successfully using affirmations can boost mood, improve self-esteem, increase motivation, enhance problem-solving abilities, promote optimism and help you address negative thoughts.

Tips for Affirmations

It's essential to keep your affirmations realistic. Repeating unrealistic statements to yourself may be counterproductive as you're unlikely to believe what you're telling yourself. For example, "My life is perfect" is a positive statement that's unlikely to improve motivation or decrease anxiety.

Instead, you should focus on crafting messages that motivate you toward change. For example, "I am working to improve my life." The following are additional tips to consider when creating your affirmations:

- Use a first-person perspective.
- Write your affirmations in the present tense.
- Acknowledge your fears and doubts in your affirmation (e.g., I can manage my anxious thoughts).
- Connect your affirmations to your core values (e.g., compassion and hard work).

Commit to reading your affirmations two or three times a day for a month and see how you feel. You can also put your affirmations where you will see them throughout the day (e.g., near the coffee pot) to ensure they're at the center of your thoughts.

Conclusion

Affirmations can be a powerful tool for change and self-love. However, they don't work for everyone. Contact a mental health professional if you're experiencing persistent anxiety symptoms.

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