Just Breathe

Having too much stress can contribute to depression and anxiety. In today’s busy world, learning effective stress reduction techniques is imperative. How many times have you heard the term “just take a deep breath” when you are stressed? Breathing in a certain way can really help to activate the stress reduction mechanisms in your body.

Learning and practicing to regulate breathing by breathing in for four counts and exhaling for six creates a breathing rhythm that helps relaxation and calm the body. Regulate your breathing by doing six cycles of this patterned breathing in and out per minute.

Breathing in helps to energize your body; breathing out helps to evoke relaxation.

The other thing that happens to the body when one breathes in the manner described above is that the heart rate is regulated to respiration. This promotes heart health.

Next time you are stressed, take a “Breathing Break”.

In the modern world, competing demands and pressures can result in feeling stressed and unbalanced. Chronic stress can lead to depression. In a given year, thirteen to fourteen million people living in the United States experience depression. Estimates are that twenty percent of the population will experience some form of depression in their lifetime. Depression can’t be overcome by sheer willpower. It often requires appropriate therapeutic and/or pharmacological intervention. The good news is depression is a treatable illness.

Signs and symptoms of depression
Depression is more than an ordinary experience of sadness or “the blues”. Some common symptoms are:

- Loss of interest in activities that formerly brought joy and pleasure
- Changes to weight or appetite
- Reduced tolerance and increased agitation and irritability
- Feelings of fatigue, sluggishness or lack of energy
- Disturbances in sleep
- Inability to concentrate, focus, remember or make decisions
- Increase in physical pains such as headaches and back, muscle and stomach pains
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or harsh self-reproach
- Social withdrawal/isolating
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Thoughts of suicide

Depression may present differently for men, women, teens and older adults. Understanding these differences can be relevant to identifying depression.

Men and depression
Depression often presents itself differently for men. Men may:

- Complain about physical symptoms and exhaustion
- Experience sexual problems
- Escape or withdraw through alcohol/drugs, TV, video games, compulsive computer use, including pornography
- Experience anger, restlessness, increased agitation
- Exhibit reckless or violent behavior

Women and depression
Depressed women often present:

- Sadness or depressed moods
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, low energy
- Episodes of crying

Hormonal changes following birth or menopause may contribute to depression.

Teens and depression
As teen years are thought of as turbulent times, depression can be overlooked, resulting in only one in five depressed teens receiving appropriate help. Signs of depression include:

- Social withdrawal and isolation from friends, school, family and activities
- Decreased concentration, failure to do homework, drop in grades

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UCLA Staff & Faculty Counseling Center
Depression Awareness Newsletter

Potential Causes of Depression
- Chronic stress
- Family history of depression
- Lack of sleep
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Loneliness or loss
- Health problems/chronic pain
- Difficult life transitions

Lifestyle Changes to Impact Depression
- Practicing stress management techniques
- Self-care through regular exercise, sleep and proper nutrition
- Challenging negative thought patterns
- Cultivating supportive relationships
- Recognizing the value in seeking
Feeling bad about oneself
Increased use of alcohol and drugs
Increased irritability and anger
Talk about suicide or death

Older adults and depression
Presentation of primarily physical symptoms, resulting in depression being overlooked in this age group
A result of the side effect of prescription medications and their interactions
Losses in functioning, health problems and increased isolation can contribute to depression

Bipolar Disorder
Individuals with Bipolar Disorder may present with an episode of depressive symptoms and may be misdiagnosed as being only depressed. Bipolar disorder is characterized by mood swings that alternate between depression and periods of high energy, less need for sleep, hyperactivity or impulsivity. These mood swings may contribute to erratic behavior and cause difficulty in one’s life. An accurate assessment of Bipolar Disorder is important to ensure appropriate treatment.

Treating Depression
Learn more about depression to better understand its impact

If appropriate, exercise to help restore biochemical balance in the brain which can improve depression.
Keep active and involved, even if it takes effort
If symptoms become too debilitating, it is important to acknowledge and accept current limitations without self-reproach. It may help to take necessary time off, let go of some pressures, and seek professional help. When indicated, this can help mitigate symptoms so functioning can improve/restore
Avoid use of non-prescribed medication and alcohol/drugs, which can cause adverse effects
Reach out to understanding/caring people, allowing them to provide support. When there is a less than adequate social support network, turn to a licensed therapist, support group, faith-based beliefs, or a loved pet which can make a big difference in feeling less alone
Psychotherapy can provide important tools to combat depression. It can help to reframe negative thinking patterns, improve coping strategies, increase perspective/insight, and provide support/understanding
Psychotropic medication, if indicated, along with psychotherapy help alleviate problematic symptoms and restore biochemical balance in the brain

Common beliefs that impede getting needed help
Distress is a personal and private matter, not to be shared
Need to be self-reliant and fix/solve own problem
Needing help is a sign of weakness
Shame in admitting problems
Minimizing problem/”Grin and Bear It”
Mistrust of mental health services and fear of treatment
Differing or opposing views about the causes and treatment of depression

Depression is a treatable illness
The UCLA Staff and Faculty Counseling Center (SFCC) offers free, confidential, and professional counseling to help employees (and their immediate family members/significant others) prevent, assess, and treat depression.

SFCC also provides stress coaching and a Biofeedback Program to help employees learn techniques to manage stress.

If you are interested in learning more about our services and/or scheduling an appointment, please call our office at 310-794-0245

Visit our website:
http://map.ais.ucla.edu/portal/site/UCLA/menuitem.3f8e7342ad4ca217b66d4ab4f848344a/?vgnextoid=00a340012db6ff00VgnVCM100008f8443a4RCRD

Emotional
Social
Physical
YOU