

# BREATHING—THE BASICS

by Mary French, RN, MSW, LCSW-C

## Breathing

We tend to take breathing for granted; after all, we have been breathing all of our lives. It isn't until we have some difficulty breathing that we might notice the importance of breath. The first and most important skill to master when learning to cope with stress and pain is diaphragmatic breathing.

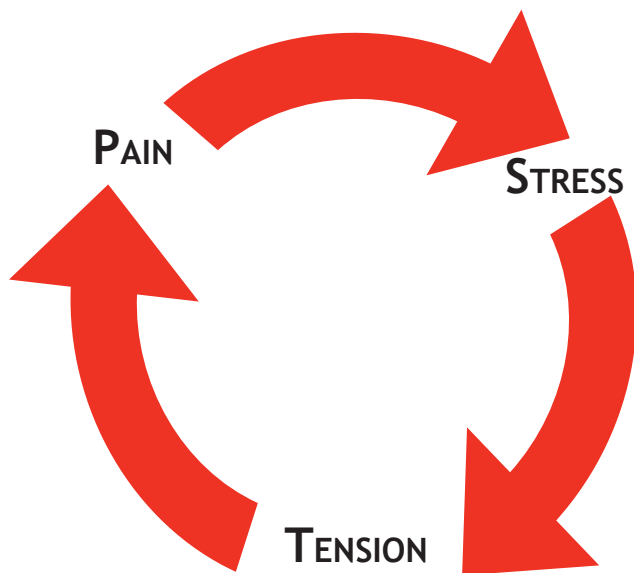
### Take the breathing test

Lie down in a prone position with your knees slightly bent. Place one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your abdomen above your umbilicus area. As you breathe, which area is rising more, the chest or the abdomen?

### Chest breathing: Counterproductive for pain management

When you are in pain, the “wrong” way to breathe is to expand the chest and suck in the abdomen, or “chest breathing.” Stress and pain tend to increase muscle tension and also contribute to shallow, chest breathing. When breathing in this way, it is difficult to relax, and the diaphragm cannot contract completely to allow the lungs to fully expand with air. In order to break the pain/stress cycle, it is important to relax the body.

Remember the pain/stress cycle:



\*\* Diaphragmatic breathing is necessary to relax the body and break the stress/pain cycle. \*\*

# MINDFULNESS-BASED PRACTICES

by Mary French, RN, MSW, LCSW-C

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is based on ancient Buddhist practices of Vipassana (“Insight”) Meditation and was first introduced into mainstream hospital-based programs in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Consistently, studies have shown a dramatic reduction in pain for many who have completed eight-week programs at the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Since the 1970s, MBSR has flourished and is now being taught in many major medical institutions as part of the mind-body movement in Integrative Medicine.

Mindfulness practice helps with a broad range of medical and psychological issues such as anxiety, stress, pain, and chronic illness. It facilitates deep states of relaxation in which one is able to pay attention to distracting thoughts, sensation, and discomfort, while at the same time learning to work with, rather than ignore, information from the body and mind. The benefits of these techniques include an increased sense of balance and an enhanced capacity to handle life’s challenges with greater clarity and wisdom.

There are many lessons to be learned from the practice of mindfulness, which is achieved by maintaining moment-by-moment, nonjudgmental awareness through a variety of meditative practices. By increasing awareness of the present moment, we increase our ability to:

- See pain closely and clearly.
- Change our relationship and response to pain.
- Realize that we are not our pain and that, at times, we perceive our pain through inaccurate predictions of doom and fear, which contribute greatly to our level of distress.
- Bring a curiosity and interest to what we are experiencing and develop a greater awareness of what our bodies are telling us, strengthening our natural feedback mechanisms to promote regulation and balance of the body and mind.
- Realize we can influence pain levels.
- Learn to use breath to penetrate and soften pain.
- Begin to see that pain, along with everything in life, is constantly changing and we can learn to ride the “waves” of pain knowing it will not always stay at intense levels.
- Decrease negative attentional bias – see more of the positive in our experiences.
- Develop compassionate attitudes toward the self and others.

For more information or to find a program/practitioner near you, visit the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness website, [www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr/](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr/).

# CHANGING YOUR MESSAGES AND RESPONSES

## CLOSE YOUR EYES

Imagine you are at a conference, in a grocery store, or sitting at a social gathering, and the pain intensifies. You wonder how you will make it through without losing control. Then all of a sudden someone comes over to talk to you and asks you a question. You are in pain. You don't want them to know you are in pain. Your mind goes blank. The person is waiting for you to respond.

What is your pain level?

What are all the thoughts going through your head?

Choose one negative thought:

- What does that thought do to you?
- What are you feeling/how does it make you feel?
- What do you think the person is thinking of you? How does that make you feel?
- How do you finally respond? How does that make you feel?
- What do these feelings, beliefs, and thoughts do to your pain?

## How to respond

- Don't negate yourself.
- Say in one word what you are feeling/experiencing.
- How would you like to deal with the situation appropriately?
- Be patient with yourself and do it.
- Compliment yourself on your bravery.
- What positive thing did you learn about yourself?

## NOW

- Change the original thought to a non-judgmental thought about yourself. What is your experience/how do you feel now?
- Re-experience the above scenario with this new thought.
- What was different?
- How do you feel about yourself now?
- What is your pain level now?

## AFFIRMATIONS

- I AM IN CONTROL OF MY TREATMENT.
- I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT BY MEDICAL PROVIDERS.
- I HAVE THE RIGHT TO GET 2<sup>ND</sup>, 3<sup>RD</sup>, 4<sup>TH</sup>, ... OPINIONS AS NEEDED.
- I ALWAYS HAVE OPTIONS.
- I AM NOT A VICTIM.
- I AM NOT MY PAIN.
- I AM ALLOWED TO ASK FOR HELP.
- I AM ALLOWED NOT TO BE PERFECT.
- I AM ALLOWED TO CHANGE PLANS IF I AM NOT FEELING WELL.
- I AM ALLOWED TO SAY NO!
- I AM ALLOWED TO VEG OUT—IT'LL BE THERE TOMORROW.
- I CHOOSE NOT TO BE ALONE IN MY PAIN.
- I AM VALUABLE; I COUNT.
- I AM GRATEFUL FOR WHAT I HAVE.
- I CAN SEE HEALING IN MY LIFE.
- I WILL HONOR MYSELF BY TAKING CARE OF MYSELF TODAY.
- I CAN GROW AS A PERSON.
- I AM A GOOD PERSON.
- I CAN RE-CREATE MYSELF.

# SELF-HYPNOSIS

Self-hypnosis is also called autohypnosis, and it can help you accomplish a realistic goal. Hypnosis is a complementary tool that you may use with other forms of health care to assist you in coping with pain and illness or to overcome a nasty habit. Hypnosis is using the strength of the mind/body connection to increase your well-being. Many people use self-hypnosis to assist in changing habits or improving their lives in some way. Some of the reasons you might like to try self-hypnosis include to:

- Quit smoking or another unwanted habit.
- Decrease anxiety.
- Increase confidence.
- Improve ability to speak in front of others.
- Decrease fear of flying.
- Assist with many chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, back pain, headaches, and pain from cancer.
- Decrease fear/pain of medical procedures.
- Increase success of an eating plan.
- Decrease anxiety on a job interview.

Self-hypnosis involves learning to put yourself into a trance state and giving yourself suggestions. This usually requires some instruction and practice. Remember that people have different hypnotic talents. Some people are highly hypnotizable while others are able to achieve a lighter trance state. People who are very logical, highly organized, and have critical minds may have a lesser talent for hypnosis. People who are more emotional, less judgmental, and generally trusting of authority may have a greater hypnotic talent.

With practice, however, regardless of your hypnotic talent, you can learn to use the power of your mind to improve health and well-being. The more you practice, the deeper trance state you will be able to achieve. Generally, you must practice self-hypnosis daily or several times a day to master the skill. It is best to practice at least twice a day when learning self-hypnosis. You may make a recording for yourself if you wish. Keep a log and consider practicing in the morning and at night during the first week, increasing your practice during the second week. After practicing for one to two weeks, you may be able to enter into a trance state in less than one minute.

At first it is best to find a quiet place to practice where you won't be interrupted by phone calls. Wear loose and comfortable clothing, especially at the waist. If possible, remove contact lenses. You may set a gentle-sounding alarm if you wish. As you become proficient, you will be able to practice hypnosis just about anywhere except while driving a car.

## Induction

There are many different methods to induce a trance state. The eye-fixation method involves:

- Sitting comfortably, leaning back in a chair, and finding a spot to stare at. You may set your alarm for ten minutes.
- It might be a spot on the wall, or a ceiling tile or a picture—anything you can rest and focus your eyes on.

# IMPORTANCE OF PACING

by Mary French, RN, MSW, LCSW-C

Chronic pain can be overwhelming, and it can be difficult to believe that we can work with our pain. One of the most important interventions we can consider is *pacing*.

Pacing requires that you actually pay attention to the pain closely and clearly so that you can begin to identify activities and lifestyle issues that can trigger intense pain cycles. Many times we think we know how much we can handle, and many times we are wrong.

There are many reasons why we do not see our limits clearly and pace ourselves:

- We don't want to disappoint family and friends.
- We were able to do it yesterday.
- We are having a good day and do not pay attention to the body.
- We ignore the body.
- We refuse to accept what is (this is different from resignation).
- We have obligations.
- We are trying to manage intense feelings such as anger or depression that tend to cloud our ability to see clearly.
- We decide to push through pain.
- We start to wonder if we are weak.
- We feel it would be easier to continue an activity than to explain to others.
- We haven't taken the time to determine our limits.

Remember that we spiral downward into an intense pain cycle when we don't pace our activities.

- Use a log to keep track of activities, time spent, pain level for one week only – any longer and we can become too focused on pain – try to notice the actual physical sensations such as pressure, burning, twisting, or throbbing rather than thoughts or judgments about the sensations.
- Use a watch with a timer.
- Discuss limits in advance with family and friends.
- Do not overestimate your tolerance.
- Schedule rest time.
- Work on acceptance of your level of ability.
- Do not judge yourself by other's expectations or opinions.
- Do not judge yourself by your own unrealistic expectations or opinions.
- Give yourself permission to pace appropriately.

## REMEMBER THAT THE SIMPLE THINGS CAN HELP

We often rely on medical interventions to feel better. Remember that simple things can help.

- Rest
- Water
- Nutritious food
- Music
- Laughter
- Hugs
- Crying
- Watching children play
- Sitting in nature
- Simple exercise – e.g., head roll or shoulder shrug
- Watching a favorite movie
- Bath
- Heating pad
- Calling your doctor
- Calling a friend
- Calling a group member
- Allowing yourself to feel bad today
- Books on tape
- Photographs
- Prayer
- Breathing
- Guided imagery
- Tea/herbal
- Pets
- Hobbies
- Fresh flowers
- Candles
- Incense – aromatherapy
- Inspirational affirmations or books
- Keeping a healing basket by your bed filled with items that are soothing