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How to reduce stress

How to prevent cardio-vascular diseases or how to live with one once it affected you

How to relax in the right way?

In order to answer this question, we first have to take a look to at the opposite and to get to know stress better. Stress, by the way, is not bad for our health at all. There is no problem with acute and short-time stress in critical situations. Stress symptoms like tachycardia are actually a natural body response. We asked Dr. Nidal Moughrabi (DeHypnotherapist and Meditation Trainer) why it is like that. And he told us that "stress is an evolutionary reaction. When our ancestors met a tiger in the jungle, they had either the option to fight or to take flight. The stress response of the body was important for the next steps: hormones like cortisol and noradrenaline would create a higher pulse rate of the heart, so that the muscles received a higher supply of blood. The immune system would get activated because the person could get injured. Neither digestion nor sexual activity were needed and therefore they would shut down. After a short while the animal might be already dead and in the shape of a good steak on the plate. Then all inner stress activities would cease and the person would start relaxing."

Nowadays our reaction to stress is still the same (except the part with the tiger steak). It is a natural body response. But the problem is that most people's stress situations are chronic. "As a result there is almost no more coming to a rest. We are the whole time in a state of alert, as if the tiger is threatening us all the time. But today it is rather the superior in the office than the tiger and usually you can't run away from him", explains the doctor jokingly.

The effects on the body are severe: there is a permanent release of stress hormones. The immune system is on alarm, resulting in infections and autoimmune diseases.

There is a high pressure on the cardio-vascular system. The blood vessels are getting blocked by deposits and the person is in danger of a heart attack. Sleeping disorders and restlessness are becoming more frequent. Permanent stress is one of the major causes for a heart attack – along with smoking, overweight, nutrition containing lots of fats and calories. Lately there has been a lot of research about the negative effects of stress on the heart. Dr. Moughrabi elaborates: “Swedish researchers observed more than 130.000 people with stress-related diseases over decades. As a result they were able to prove that these people had more cardio-vascular diseases by 64% compared to healthy people. An English research observed 70.000 healthy people over years. Experiencing psycho-social stress resulted in a 21% higher probability to die.”

It is difficult to escape the pressure completely, but are there any chances to get at least out of this spiral of stress? And what can we do?

There are different methods for different people. The expert explains: “The most important thing is to find one that you enjoy, so that you will keep on doing it on a regular basis. In case you have only painful legs, it doesn’t make sense to book a Yoga course for several days. Most people enjoy a daily walk in nature and relax. But better don’t take your smartphone with you or at least put it on silent mode. It is also important to inquire the patient who is coming with stress about his resources and former experiences. Someone who is already experienced in autogenic training (a specific method of self-hypnosis) should ideally go on with it.” To be on the safe side, people with a severe heart disease should consult their doctor before they start any intensive exercises. “But whoever can walk up to the first floor, can do any relaxation exercise without any problems.” The good message is that relaxation exercises don’t have any negative side effects. Not only that you can overcome stress with them, but you can also improve your mood, the immune system, get a positive rejuvenating effect and much more.

Dr. Moughrabi, who is also a meditation trainer, is sure about it: “Meditation is an excellent method to get out of this spiral of stress, I am very much in favour of it. And it is, by the way, much more than just a relaxation technique. People’s life becomes much healthier. There are now more than 8000 scientific papers about meditation. And it is scientifically proven that it lowers the blood pressure, the heart rate and the

level of the stress hormone named cortisol (stressed people show higher levels of this hormone in their blood compared to people without stress).

One can use this method to prevent the occurrence of heart diseases - and even in case a heart disease already occurred. This has been proven by a scientific research with patients suffering from coronary heart disease. In this disease the heart's great vessels which provide oxygen to the heart muscle, are narrowed by deposit. Dr. Moughrabi explains: "The patients in this research were taught how to perform transcendental meditation on a daily basis for 5 years. And the results were overwhelming: compared to patients without meditation, these patients had a 48% lower rate of heart attacks and strokes. There is no medication which can induce such an impressive improvement."

Most people already have heard about meditation and maybe they imagine people in uncomfortable positions making strange things with their fingers. Most of them don't know what meditation really is and how it works. Dr. Moughrabi explains: "Meditation is totally simple and a natural phenomenon. It is nothing else than being present in the here and now, which we usually are not, because our thoughts are wandering around. During almost 50% of our awakening time we are thinking about the past or the future. Pondering around or having trouble with the superior in the office means we are with our mind in the "yesterday". Worrying about the future means that the mind is in the "tomorrow". Using the smartphone in an excessive way additionally fuels mind's activity, it becomes more and more difficult to stay in the here and now. In the end we miss half of our life and many beautiful moments by this.

The hypnotherapist and meditation trainer Dr. Moughrabi recommends to start with the following, in case you are interested in learning meditation: "Sit down, close your eyes and observe your thoughts without judging. Anything can be there, don't try to push something away, but don't go into it either. Simply come back and observe, in case you noticed that you drifted off. After a while the thoughts start to become a little bit less noisy. Start meditating 15 minutes a day in the beginning, later you can extend this."

Meditation exercises recommended by the expert

1) Empty your mind with Gibberish

It is difficult to zone out because of the huge amount of thoughts in our mind. Try to throw out these thoughts with "Gibberish": you will gibber/talk loudly for 15 minutes in a language which doesn't exist. Express everything which is currently present in the mind like thoughts, emotions or anxieties. Speak loudly, don't make any breaks in between and don't use any words you know. Move your body while doing so, use your arms and hands for gesticulation and listen to yourself. In case you do not know what to say or you consider this exercise as stupid, then express exactly this – just do it in Gibberish. You may be loud and intense. Afterwards sit down immediately, close your eyes and observe what is inside you. Ideally you would do this exercise at the end of your working day.

2) Dancing

The most simple exercise you can imagine is called dancing. Anyone knows how to do it and don't worry ... nobody has to see it. Create your personal playlist with some peppy songs. Dance for 15 minutes, and ideally use your headphones. You also might give it a try to dance blindfolded, but take care and put some rolled towels or pillows between you and any dangerous zone in your room. Then sit down immediately, close your eyes for 15 minutes and listen inside.

3) Breath

You can try this exercise with or without being active before. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and observe your breath. Focus on each detail of your normal breath. Then bring the focus of your awareness to the end of the exhalation and to the end of the inhalation, where each time the breath stops for a short moment. Continue this inner observation for 15 minutes. Whenever thoughts are distracting you, simply bring your awareness softly back to this two observation points.

4) The breath swing

Simply breath normally and observe the breath for 15 minutes. There are 4 stages:

- Close your eyes and listen to the sound of your own breath
- Then bring your awareness to that part of the inhalation, which enters your belly.

You may place one hand on the belly.

- Then bring your awareness to the exhalation, to the stream of your breath which leaves the body through your mouth and lips.
- And now connect these two observation points with each other, belly and mouth, mouth and belly. Your breath is just like a swing or a bow between belly and mouth.

Watch outs– Tips by Dr. Nidal Moughrabi

Spacing out

It is normal that thoughts are wandering. It is great when you become aware of it. Now simply come back to a non-judgemental observation. This will happen hundreds of times. Never try not to think. This is not possible in the beginning.

Body posture

Sit comfortably with erected spine. There is no need to sit like a Buddha and you don't have to do anything with your fingers. It doesn't matter how it looks. Except if you want to post it on Instagram – but this would anyway have nothing to do with meditation.

Activity

Though it is absolutely normal, it is not easy for many people just to sit silently. But it becomes much easier after having been physically active before. Everyone has experienced relaxation after doing sports (but the relaxation after meditation is much deeper). For this purpose the Indian mystic and meditation teacher Osho invented the "OSHO Active Meditations", which make it easier for the modern and stressed man to relax. The exercises on the previous page are either coming from him (1 and 3) or are inspired by his ideas (2 and 4).