

The Power of The Breath: The Mind-Body Connection Tips for Coping with Pain and Stress

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**NANCY O'BRIEN
CERTIFIED YOGA THERAPIST**

**SCLERODERMA, VASCULITIS & MYOSITIS
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Learning Objectives

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- Understand the meaning of “mindful breathing”
- Learn about the benefits of mindful breathing
- Understand the connection between stress and pain
- Learn breathing and gentle movement techniques
- Practice deep relaxation together

What is “mindful breathing”?

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- Bring awareness to your breath.
- Say to yourself “ I am breathing in, I am breathing out.”
- Choose a particular practice based on your needs at that exact moment.

BENEFITS OF MINDFUL BREATH

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- Enhances movement, inside and out
- Movement of the ribs is tracked by the brain
- Deeper movement = stronger signal to de-stress
- Length of the exhalation is also tracked by the brain
- Longer exhalation = stronger signal to de-stress

Less Stress Can Mean Less Pain

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- Stress can contribute to discomfort, worry, tension, inflammation, pain, dis-ease
- DE-stress and, potentially, reduce your pain or discomfort

HOW? YOU HAVE THE POWER

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- Be kind to yourself. Try mind-body practices
- They are proven to de-stress our minds, bodies and feelings
- Practices like mindful breathing can translate to a lessening of pain or discomfort

HOW? Are We Breathing??

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- Breath is always available to us – at the airport, doctor's office, waiting for the bus, on hold with the insurance company, in bed.
- Bring your focus to that breath.

Three-Part Breath – The Basic Breath

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- Before we begin, notice your level of comfort and continue at your own speed.
- Support yourself in a comfortable, though alert, position (seated, reclining, semi-reclining – even standing).
- Gently expand the belly as you begin to inhale.
- Gently expand the lower ribs (feel them with your hands to be sure they move) as you continue.
- Gently expand the upper chest, lengthening, opening.

A POWERFUL SIGNAL TO THE BRAIN

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- To breathe out, first bring in the upper ribs.
- Then bring in the lower ribs (find those muscles!).
- Finally, bring the belly toward the spine like a sit-up.
- Making the breath out longer than the breath in calms the nervous system.

LESS STRESS CAN HELP REDUCE INFLAMMATION

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- Inflammation plays a role in pain.
- Release tension— pain and discomfort can be reduced.
- Gentle movement and relaxation from mindful breathing can open up the tension and struggle around pain and discomfort (including inflammation).

GOT PAIN – PHYSICAL OR MENTAL?

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- Have compassion for yourself.
- Be kind to yourself. You deserve it living with the challenges of Scleroderma, Vasculitis or Myositis!
- Accept yourself exactly where you are at this moment with compassion.

FREEDOM -- CHOOSE AN INTENTION

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- Focus on a thought or intention – whatever you may need or want (strength, courage, compassion, wishing comfort for yourself or another person or group).
- Hold the thought in your mind and imagine that intention in your heart too, while you breathe in.
- Let your thought or intention spread out like a wave or a breeze from your heart as you breathe out.

LIKE THE WIND MOVES THE TREES

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- Gently move with the breath – like the wind moves the trees
- Open, lengthen and safely stretch while breathing in.
- Release, and like a sponge, very gently squeeze and fold in while breathing out.

BREATH OF COMFORT

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- Seated, put your hands on your knees.
- Slide the hands back toward your hips as you breathe in your intention – comfort or strength or joy ...
- Draw the shoulders and elbows back and lift your heart.
- Breathe out negativity as you slide the hands back to your knees.
- Gently fold forward and lower your chin.
- Repeat a few times.

THERE'S MORE?

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- Your digestion (stomach, bowels) is gently moved and toned with deep, mindful breath.
- Stress hormones can be reduced.
- Feel-good hormones are released for a sense of well-being.
- Lungs and heart are moved and toned by the movement a mindful breath creates.

A LITTLE HELP -- BOX BREATH

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- To help make mindful breath more easy to get to, try Box Breath (especially when you need some peace).
- First, relax and make yourself as comfortable as possible.
- As you breathe in, use your hand to trace the side of a box, bottom to top (or imagine tracing the box).
- Hold your breath gently as your hand traces the top of the box.
- Breathe out as you trace the other side of the box, top to bottom.
- Hold your breath gently as you complete tracing the box, crossing the hand back across to your starting point.

A GOOD KIND OF DISTRACTION

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- The mind-body breathing practices work through physical movement and mental and emotional changes, but also through distraction.
- The focus on the breath and the visualizations of color or shifting attention to various parts of the body help to broaden or shift our brain's attention from the pain it is perceiving.

The Five R's

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Mind-body practices allow our nervous systems to switch from chronic stress to “The Five Rs”

- Rest
- Renew
- Rebuild
- Restore
- Revitalize

DEEP RELAXATION – THE GOLD STANDARD

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- Starting from your toes, squeeze and release every part of your body – calves, thighs, fists, arms, buttocks, face.
- Expand your belly with a breath in. Hold it in for a moment and sigh as you breathe out.
- Repeat with your chest.
- Come to calm. Imagine a healing wave or breeze or color and begin to bring that healing energy to your toes. Continue on up, bringing relaxation to every part of your body – skin, joints, muscles, organs. (Continued on next page)

Deep Relaxation, continued

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- Mentally take a step back and see the body at rest, all cells on all layers of the body and mind at ease.
- Bring the focus to the breath and observe it, without changing it, for a minute.
- Bring the focus to the mind and watch everything come and go like clouds for a minute.
- Allow the space between the thoughts, the clouds, to broaden and deepen. Gently inhabit that space.
- Rest deeply, in your own sense of wholeness and deepest source of healing for several minutes or longer.
- Bring yourself out with gentle movement, deepening breath. Take a few moments to bring this peace back to the room and the rest of your day or night.

OUR CONSTANT COMPANION

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- Your breath is always there.
- Have compassion for yourself! Make the most of that companion.
- Bring your attention to your breath.
- Choose an intention – gratitude, courage, compassion. Choose whatever you or any friend or loved one or the world needs to accompany that breath into your heart.
- Use the three-part breath to make it as powerful as possible, making that signal to the brain crystal clear.

RESOURCES

- My deep relaxation is on HSS's patient education website. With the following link, navigate to the guided meditation link in the right-hand column.
<https://www.hss.edu/health-video-library.asp>.
- Monthly mind-body sessions with Nancy O'Brien through the RA Clinic.
- Therapeutic, gentle and restorative yoga classes at HSS and other sites. Always be sure the teacher is experienced.
- Guided mind-body breathing and pain practices are available online through organizations like the Arthritis Foundation.

BREATHE

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