

The Heart Breath

Regulating your breath can have a profound effect on your state of mind and physical well-being. When you feel anxious or angry, you may notice you breathe in a shallow, faster rhythm. This rhythm is often what causes subsequent feelings of dizziness, fatigue, or tightness in the chest. Furthermore, it gives rise to heart rhythm patterns that are erratic, and intensifies feelings of emotional distress.

However, if you slow down the pace of your breathing, it sends a message of calm to both your heart and nervous system. More specifically, there is a breathing pattern called the "Heart Breath" that has been shown to help people manage their emotions and actually improve their health.

Here's how to do the Heart Breath:

1. Heart Focus: Bring your attention to the area of your heart
2. Heart Breathing: Inhale for 5 seconds, and exhale for 5 seconds, repeat several times.
3. Heart Feeling : Now, recall a sincere feeling of appreciation, joy, love or compassion for someone or something, as you continue to do the Heart Breath (5 second inhale, 5 second exhale) for 3-5 minutes.

In my office I have biofeedback equipment created by an organization called Heartmath. With this equipment, you can actually see the profound impact this breathing pattern has on your heart and nervous system.

Heartmath® has done years of research on the way our emotions, brain, and heart interact. The researchers at Heartmath® stress that the intentional generation of a heartfelt positive emotional state, particularly an emotional state of appreciation, is a key component of this breathing exercise. People who regularly practice this Heart Breath a few times per day not only improve the way they feel emotionally, but they also can improve heart rate variability and their cardiac health.

Moreover, the researchers at Heartmath® have noted that when you use the Heart Breath to get your heart into this rhythm of coherence, the brain waves of people with whom you are interacting actually pick up on it and respond. So, not only will you feel better, but you will be influencing the people around you to feel better too. Check it out by doing the Heart Breath right now, and notice a shift in the way you feel after a few minutes.

I personally practice the Heart Breath several times a day and find it to be enormously helpful in managing stress and emotional responses. If you're interested in the Heartmath® biofeedback program at my office, please give me a call at (423) 876-3490. To learn more about Heartmath®, visit their website at www.heartmath.org.