

# MODULE 3

## Caring for me

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**01** Self-care

**03** Thinking differently

**02** Relaxation techniques  
to reduce stress



**S**

**E**

**L**

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**C**

**A**

**R**

**E**

**TIME**

**HELP**

**MINDSET**

**Three of every four  
caregivers have unmet  
needs**

# What is stress?

- Any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological disturbances.
- Is your **body's response** to anything that requires attention or action.
- Part of the body's natural **fight or flight response**.
- When someone feels threatened, their body releases stress hormones.
- Stress hormones cause the heart to beat faster, causing more blood to be pumped to the organs and extremities.



# What is anxiety?

- It is **activated** in response to specific stimuli (fear, doubt)
- More **Cognitive**
- **Symptoms:** Irritability, fatigue, restlessness, feelings of worry , headaches, somatic and mental difficulties and unexplained pains
- A general **dysfunction** to the person
- Several types of disorders based on anxiety



# Chronic stress in the caregivers

- ❑ The repeated long-term exposure to experiences (perceived as stressful)
- ❑ Caring for a progressively worsening dementia patient is an example of a **chronic stressor**
- ❑ **Family caregivers** and especially spouses are exposed to increased psychological and physical demands, financial costs, and guilt in caring for their patient.
- ❑ Primary caregivers will implement various strategies to cope with the new challenges of caregiving, but if they are unable to adapt, they will experience **burnout**
- ❑ People who are under situations of constant and intense stress can show deficits in memory, attention and problem-solving ability.

# Caregivers

- ❑ Experience **higher levels of depression, stress and anxiety** than non-caregivers.
- ❑ Are 46% more likely to experience depression and 25% more likely to experience anxiety symptoms.
- ❑ They experience **poor sleeping conditions**
- ❑ As a result, all the above lead to the **weakening of their immune system.**
- ❑ Family caregivers who are already in poor health are more likely to be unable to meet caregiving needs
- ❑ This results in an increased risk of disease and reduced life expectancy

# PHYSICAL HEALTH COSTS

- **Higher risk of death (mortality)**

Stressed spousal caregivers (aged 66-96) have a 63% higher mortality rate

- **Increased susceptibility of illness**

- Diminished immune response, which leads to frequent infection and increased risk of cancers and heart problems
- Health of caregivers decreased as dementia severity increased

# 10 SIGNS OF CAREGIVER STRESS

1. **Denial** about the disease and its effect on the person who has been diagnosed.  
I know Mom is going to get better
2. **Anger** at the person with Alzheimer's
3. **Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that used to make you feel good
4. **Anxiety** about the future and facing another day
5. **Depression** that breaks your spirit and affects your ability to cope
6. **Exhaustion** that makes it nearly impossible to complete necessary daily tasks
7. **Sleeplessness** caused by a never-ending list of concerns
8. **Irritability** that leads to moodiness and triggers negative responses and actions
9. **Lack of concentration** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks
10. **Health problems** that begin to take a mental and physical toll

# FACTORS AFFECTING CAREGIVERS STRESS

- Perceived high burden
- Length of time of caregiving
- Fewer perceived uplifting experiences or benefits of caregivers
- Role change
- Social isolation
- Dysfunctional family patterns
- Poor coping strategies
- Unmet needs for respite and home help

# Self-care

## Carers have obligations

The **health of the caregivers** is directly affected (social, professional relationships and interests are limited.)

They have **less time for themselves** and for things they like.

They distance themselves from society due to the increased **obligations** both to the patient and to the family in general.

They are also **affected financially**, due to the increased costs, and they need to stop or reduce working hours.

# Family caregivers

- Show **increased physical and psychiatric morbidity, low quality of life** and **social isolation**.
- Few of them have prepared for the role they were about to take on, and often they don't have the resources to handle the emotional as well as the physical demands placed on them.
- Their role, therefore, due to both emotional tension and physical exhaustion makes them the **"hidden victims"** of the disease.



# Self care

Personal care can be difficult to be achieved when taking care of a patient with dementia.

Based on studies, caregivers who had **higher resilience** experienced lower levels of anxiety and depression.

# Self care

1. How would you define self-care?
  1. Is it important as an aspect?
  1. Are there any types of self-care?

# Self care

- 1. Self-care is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health worker**

# Scenarios of carers

Mary takes care of her mother Josie who has dementia the last 6 years. Mary is divorced and lives with her 2 sons, while her second son is studying in order to get to the University. In her job, things are getting difficult and there are some cuts, and she is afraid. She cannot handle her mother as she used to, and she is feeling very tired.

# Scenarios of carers

John takes care of his wife who has dementia for the last 3 years. The last 6 months, he decided and hired a professional carer for her, by four times a week. With the help of the professional carer, John can go for a walk or meet his friend for a chess game.

# Obstacles to engage

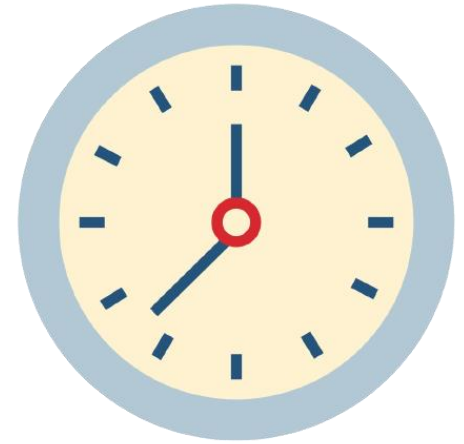
- **Personal needs are fading**
- Their schedule is full since they have other family routines, needs or obligations
- Caregivers *lack of awareness* of their personal needs
- It is common to think that self-care takes too much time
- There are caregivers that believe that are not worthy of self-care
- Being a carer doesn't mean that are powerful. Yet, taking care of their self could be consider a sign of weakness

# Testimonials of obstacles

- **John:** I don't have the time; I am too busy to do something as an extra in my life (obstacle: time)
- **Mary:** I am very tired. You need energy to engage in something you like (obstacle: energy)
- **Sarah:** All the activities I am interested in are costly. I have more important things to do (obstacle: money)
- **Josh:** I am not in the mood of doing an activity. Firstly, I need to take care of my mother and then, maybe, I will see (obstacle: mood)
- **Nancy:** I have so many somatic pains and physical limitations. I have thought of everything. There is nothing I can do (obstacle: physical limitations)
- **Jordan:** Doing something for me, means that I will run away from my father's needs (obstacle: guilt)

# Some considerations for the carers

- ❖ **Ask for help**
- ❖ Be more **flexible** with the tasks in your life and gain time as a result
- ❖ **Manage your everyday time** and decide to use a calendar
- ❖ Get the **help** you need to manage your time
- ❖ **Separate the tasks and choose from which one to start.** Complete one activity and then start the other one.





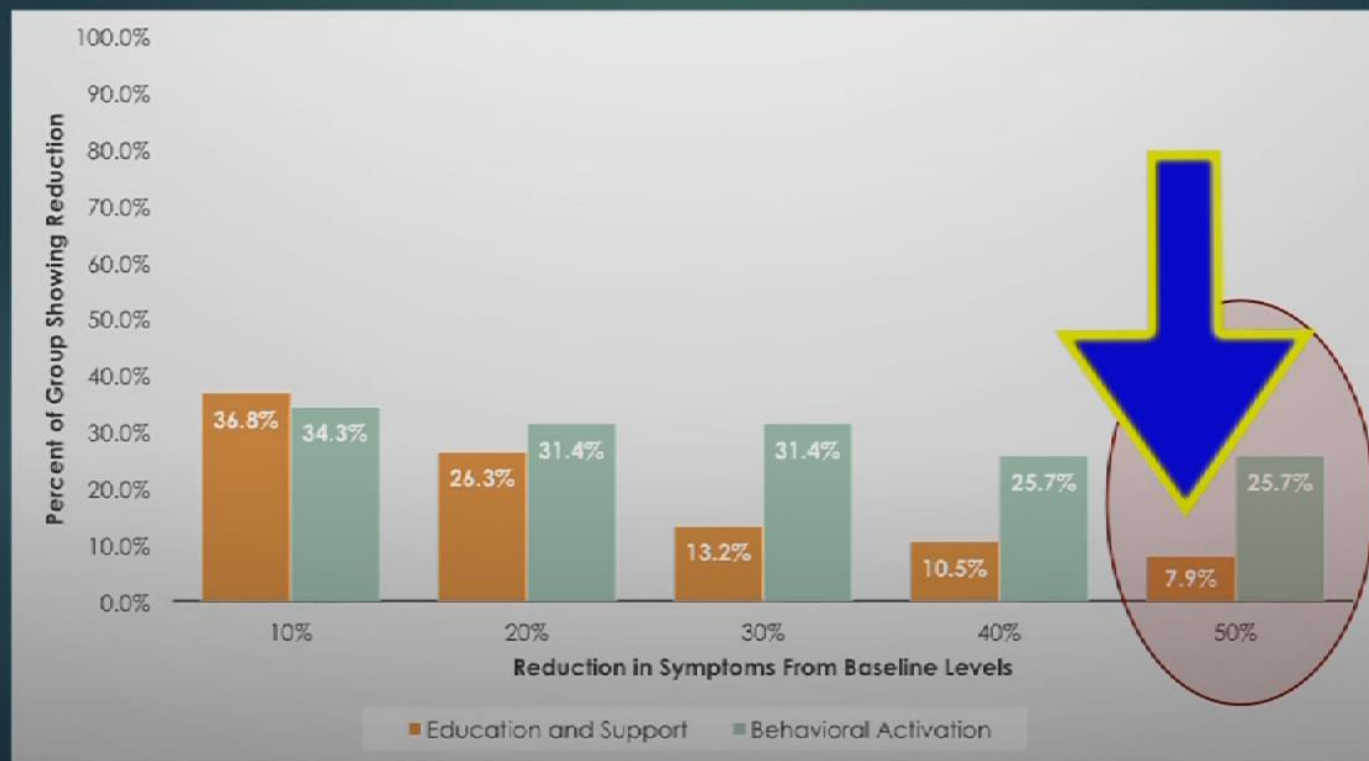
# Ways of coping with stress

- ❑ The strategies people use to cope with caregiving stress, are an important predictor of the tension and burden they experience.
- ❑ Studies that have described burnout as a state of complete physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion support that caregivers who experience intense burnout tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies.
- ❑ Such typical strategies include meditation, yoga, calming music, breathing techniques, self-care as well as seeking information and social support.
- ❑ Consequently, **caregivers who eventually experience burden** typically handle the problem of caregiving in a passive way, stoic and hoping that the problem will go away.

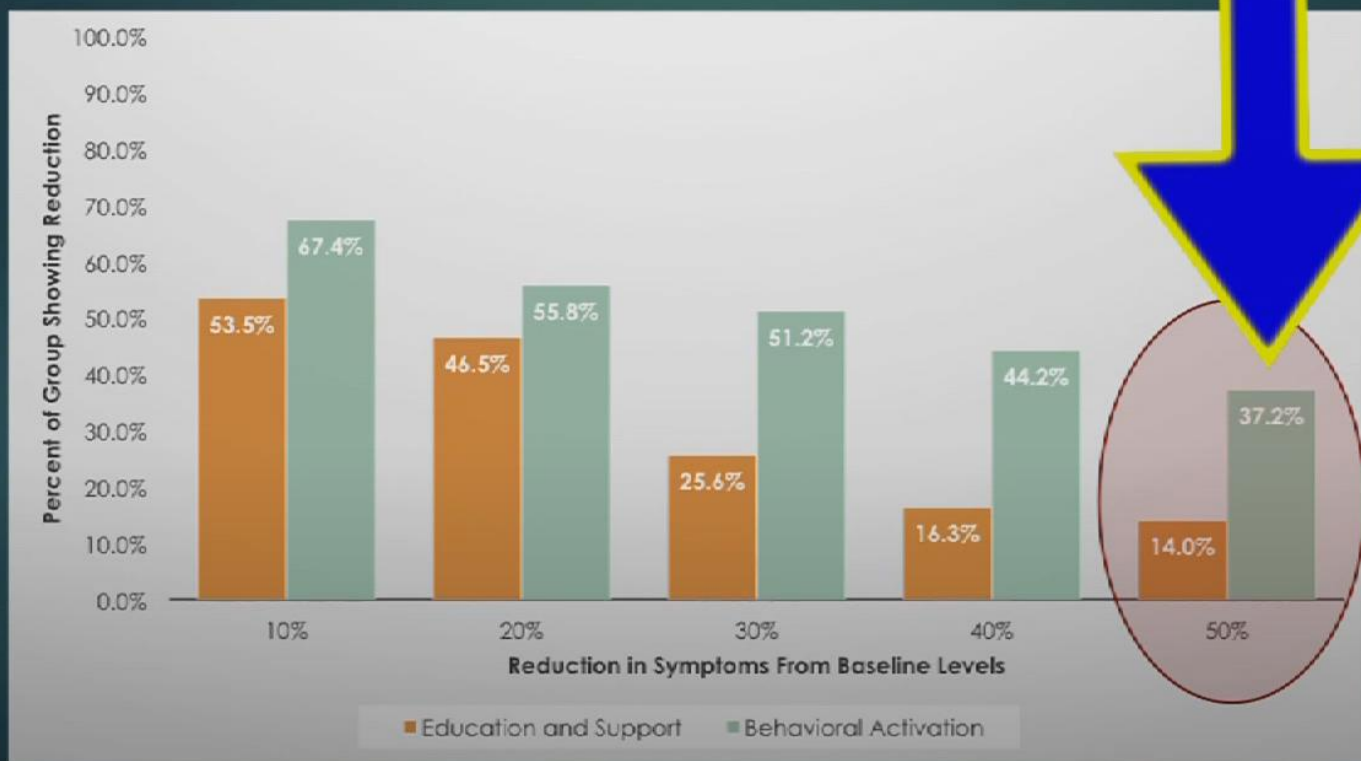
# INTERVENTIONS FOR CAREGIVERS STRESS

- Education
- Support
- Respite
- Perceiving uplifts
- Psychotherapy
- Exercise and nutrition
- Breathing
- Meditation (NSDR)/Visualization
- Behavior Activation

# Response in IL-6



# Response in Depressive Symptoms



# Joyful activities

- ❑ Will support the caregiver to relax
- ❑ The activities can be flexible and personalized
- ❑ Identify activities that can be pleasant (talk to a friend, go for a walk)
- ❑ The first step is to recognize the need.
- ❑ Most carers feel embarrassment and guilts just in the thought of doing something for themselves.
- ❑ Providing care without resting can be challenging for the caregiver.
- ❑ Carers should not hesitate to ask for help when they can get it.
- ❑ If financially they can, they can hire a professional carer to help them

# Which are the joyful activities?

- Personal preferences when referring to joyful activities
- Hobbies, gymnastics, meditation can have a pleasant impact on the carers' life
- Promote the self-growth, embrace happiness, being aware, release the tension, relax, manage stress
- Make a schedule and to include their personal pleasant activities

# Try to think and write a list of activities

- Go for a walk
- Read a book
- Exercise
- Play chess or do a puzzle
- Listen to music
- Visit a museum, a gallery
- Go to the movies
- Other:

# Combine the joyful activities with the person in dementia

- Not all times a common activity for the carer and the patient can be achieved
- Yet, it will be very pleasant and rewarding
- Carers should take some time to think and identify which are some activities that they can be both be benefited.



# Relaxation Techniques



# Is it difficult for the carers to relax?

- ❑ Caregivers are preoccupied with the care for their person in need.
- ❑ Thus, they consider that it is difficult for them to focus on and find ways of relaxing
- ❑ It is important to remember and be aware of the **relaxation dynamics**  
**TIME!!!!**
- ❑ Relaxation techniques will minimize the intense stress
- ❑ After a while, through the techniques the person will gain energy
- ❑ Discharge and relaxation are the result of the techniques on a psychological and physical level
- ❑ They are not time consuming

# Relaxation techniques

- ❑ Relaxation techniques and breathing exercises **should be the main goal of exercise programs** for people with mental disorders.
- ❑ Forms of exercise such as yoga, tai chi, Pilates can help reduce anxiety and stress.
- ❑ A **relaxation technique** (at the end of an exercise program) is an ideal choice for **stress regulation, physical well-being and physical relaxation**, after an intense day or intense exercise program.
- ❑ Music also plays a significant role as a mediate to help us relax

# Six relaxation techniques to reduce stress

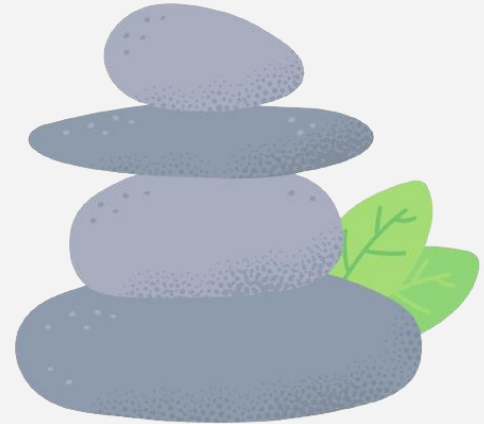


Harvard Health Publications  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL  
*Trusted advice for a healthier life*

- ❑ **Breath focus.**
- ❑ **Body scan**
- ❑ **Guided imagery**
- ❑ **Mindfulness meditation**
- ❑ **Yoga, tai chi, and qigong**
- ❑ **Repetitive prayer**

# Advantages of relaxation techniques

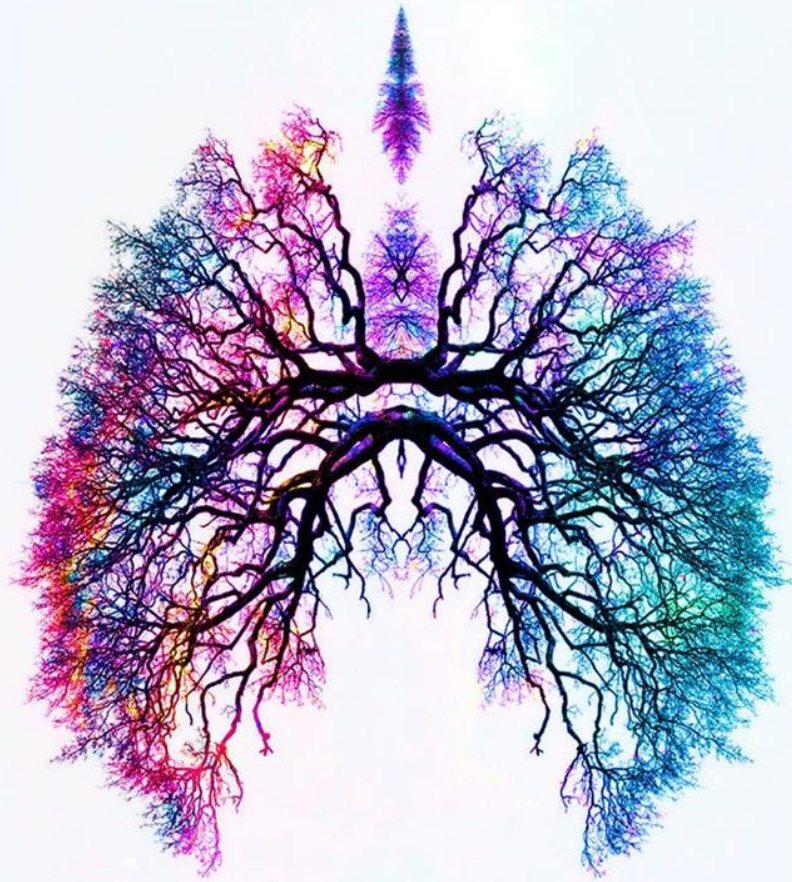
- ❖ Easy to learn
- ❖ Plethora of exercises and choices
- ❖ Can be achieved at any time, place and time.
- ❖ It can be easier to set a specific time throughout the day to perform your relaxation techniques
- ❖ Relaxation techniques can also be combined to gymnastics, or another activities



# Advantages of relaxation techniques

- ❖ Provide feelings of well-being and calmness.
- ❖ Improve sleep quality.
- ❖ They increase the ability to deal with stressful situations.
- ❖ They contribute to the mood and increase emotional stability.
- ❖ Its practice increases the ability to concentrate and remember.
- ❖ They reduce physical pain, such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea...
- ❖ They help increase the capacity for self-control.





**BREATHE**

1 minute

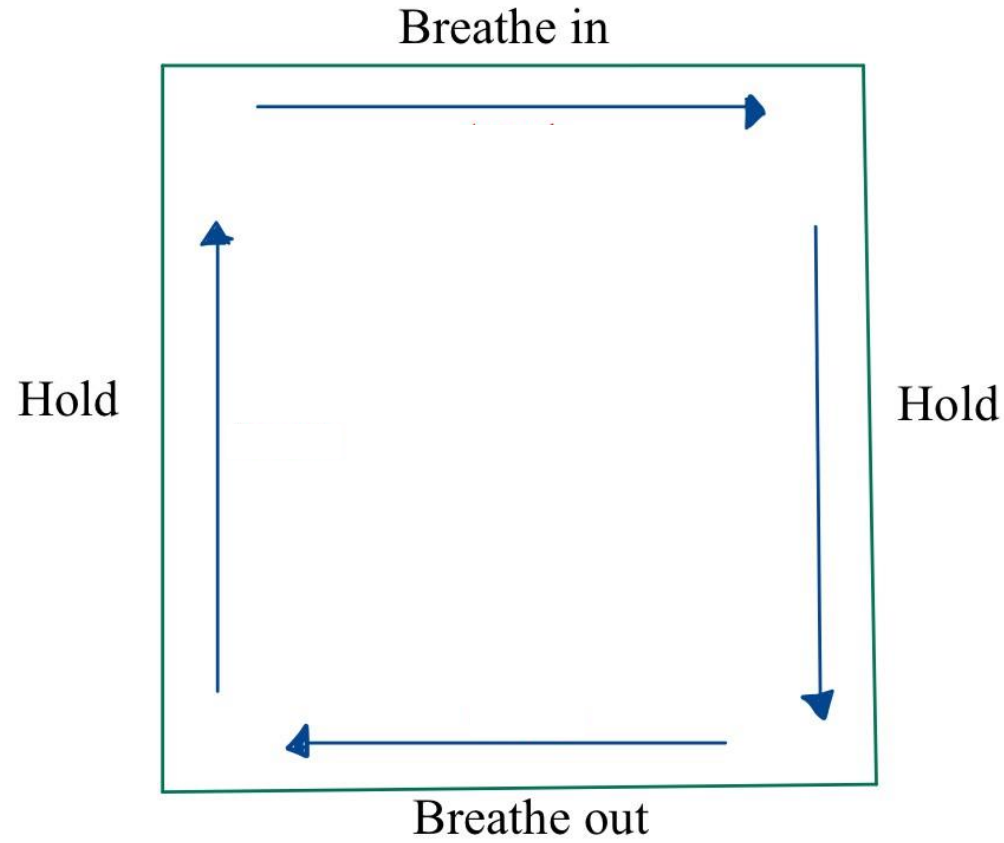




# BREATHING

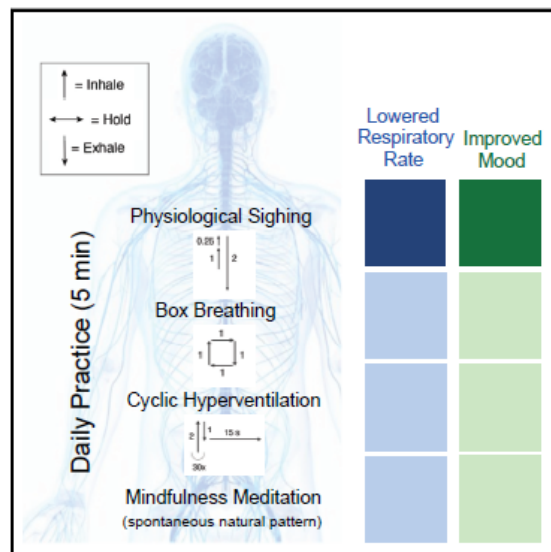
- ❑ A bridge in the brain between the conscious and the subconscious (ex: digestion, heartbeat)
- ❑ By changing your pattern of breathing you can change what your brain is capable of doing
- ❑ Exercise inhale with your nose as much as you can and the exhale also through your nose. Chrono the time to fully empty your lungs
  - $\leq 20$  sec: carbon dioxide low tolerance 3
  - 25-40 sec: carbon dioxide moderate tolerance 5-6
  - $\geq 50$  sec: carbon dioxide high tolerance 8-10

Adjusting your  
normal breathing



## Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal

### Graphical abstract



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### In brief

In a remotely conducted randomized controlled trial, Yilmaz Balban et al. study the psychophysiological effects of controlled breathwork compared with mindfulness meditation. Breathwork produces greater improvement in mood and reduction in respiratory rate, while both result in reduction in negative emotion including state anxiety.

January 17, 2023

### Highlights

- Daily 5-minute breathwork and mindfulness meditation improve mood and reduce anxiety
- Breathwork improves mood and physiological arousal more than mindfulness meditation
- Cyclic sighing is most effective at improving mood and reducing respiratory rate



- Inhalation increases your heart rate
- Exhalation decreases your heart rate



# Exercise: Cyclic sighing

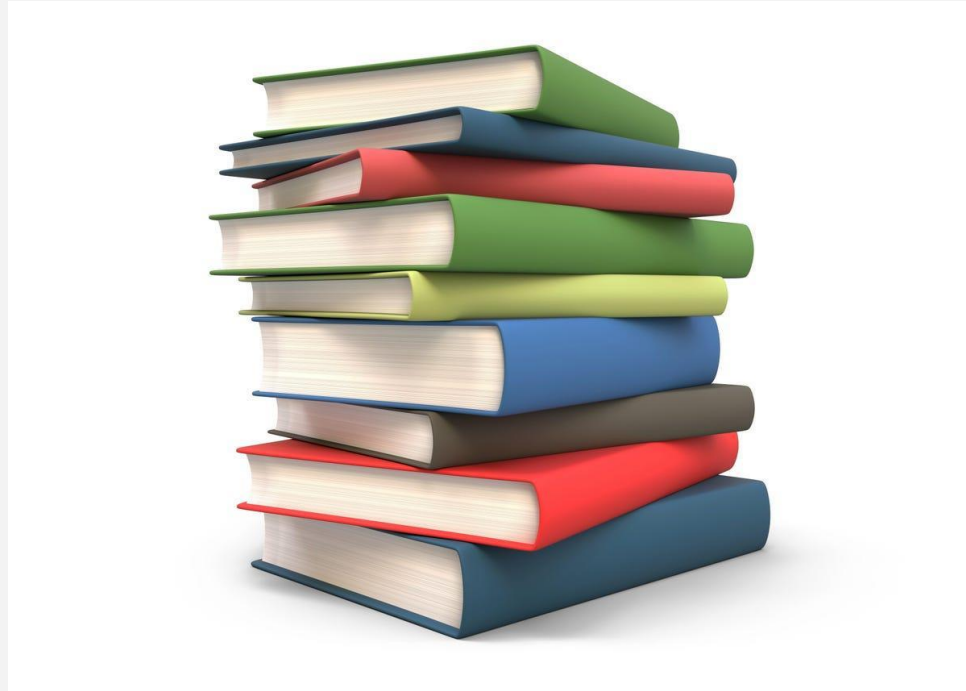
2 inhales followed by 1 long exhale

# Cyclic Hyperventilation

Self-induced stress inoculation for being calm



# Inhale for learning?



# NSDR

Non-sleep deep rest



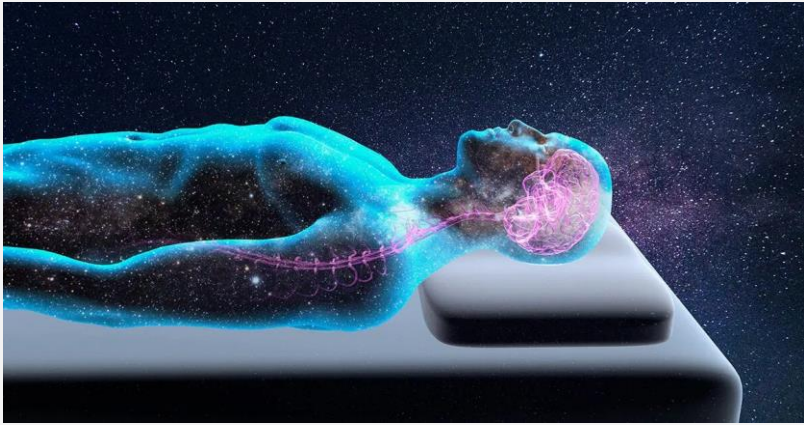


- ❑ Non-sleep deep rest, or yoga nidra, is the kind of rest you get when your body is in a relaxed state, but your mind is still awake
- ❑ NSDR involves slowing down your brain wave frequency, similar to what happens during sleep, only that in this case you're awake
- ❑ NSDR follows two steps: a self-induced state of rest followed by a period of directed, intense focus
- ❑ This is a powerful way to relax quickly and deeply



## What Does Science Say About **NSDR?**

- ❑ NSDR works by slowing down the brain waves, similar to what happens during slow-wave sleep
- ❑ Slow-wave sleep is important because it's the stage in which your body rejuvenates and heals itself. GH Hormone
- ❑ Slow-wave sleep also activates the parasympathetic nervous system and reduces the fight-or-flight sympathetic



## HEALTH BENEFITS OF NSDR

- Helps with memory retention
- Enhances rates of neuroplasticity, which can promote learning
- Relieves stress
- Improves cognitive function
- Improves sleep quality
- Enhances focus and mental clarity
- Potentially helps with pain management

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82zCILdaeos>



## Relaxation techniques - Number counting

### Time: 5 minutes

- Proper breathing is one of the simplest ways to control stress, muscle tension and achieve relaxation.
- When we are calm and relaxed, then breathing is soft, deep and rhythmic.
- When we are under pressure and tension, then breathing is shorter and irregular.
- Choose a quiet place, close your eyes and start focusing on your breathing
- Inhale for 3 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds, by saying “relax”
- Start counting from 20 to 0

## Relaxation techniques - Imagery

### Time: 5 minutes

- Relax your body and clear your mind
- Imagine where you want to be and with whom
- What do you see? What do you feel, hear or even smell there?
- Observe the colors and the view of the place and the person there

Breathing techniques are also helpful

Concentrate in your breathing and imagine the place you that make you feel peaceful

Close your eyes if it helps

## Time: 10-15 minutes

- Choose a chair, or prefer to stand up
- Focus on your breathing
- Take a deep breather and slowly let it out
- With the exhale, remove the tension from your body
- Hold your breath.
- The more you breath, the more relaxed you get
- You are feeling relaxed, your arms and shoulders are relaxed
- Now try to stretch as if to touch the walls

**Relaxation  
techniques**

-

**Total  
stretching**

- Stretch your arms gently in front of you
- Repeat and feel your shoulders and back to lose up
- Stretch your arms as if you will reach the sky
- Repeat the stretching towards the walls
- Stretch your arms gently in front of you
- Repeat this circle for 4 times.
- The tension is draining from your body
- Roll back your shoulders and then forward for 3 times
- Raise your shoulders and push them down
- Inhale and exhale the tension from your body

**Relaxation  
techniques**  
-  
**Total  
stretching**



# Stretching benefits

The stretches reliefs the stress

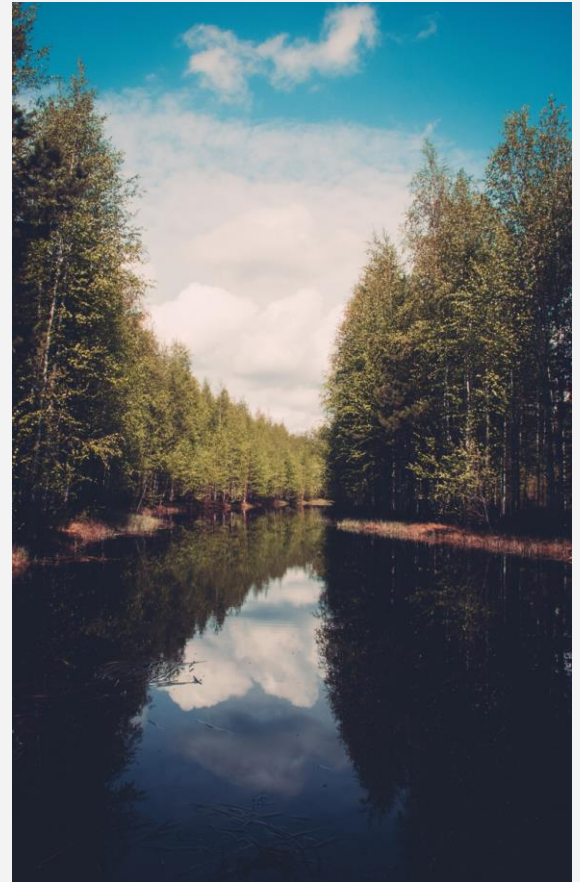
Improve the posture

The oxygen increases and flows to the brain

The meditation of relieving stress, fatigue and depression is very helpful

Flexibility improves

The sleep becomes more efficient



## Relaxation techniques

### - Muscle relaxation

#### Time: 10 - 15 minutes

- In this exercise, you will learn how to relax your muscles and release your tension.
- Imagine each part of your body, each time a different and specific muscle. Then you have to tight the muscle as much as to feel the tension for 5 seconds. Then, relax that muscle for at least 10 seconds. Now, stay in your seat for a while and become aware.
- The muscles involved in this exercise are: mouth and jaw, forehead, neck, eyes and cheeks, shoulders, back, right upper arm, right hand and forearm, chest and stomach, right food, right lower leg, right upper leg, hips and buttocks.

# 3. Thinking differently

**Changing your thinking will change how you are feeling**

# How to think in a different way

- Thinking and feeling are opposites (?!)
- Your feelings are been determined by your thoughts
- Thus, it is not the precise event that makes you feel in a certain way. It is the way you think about it.
  - The event can be anything. Imagine that:
    - Your spouse is accusing you for not offering the suitable care.
    - Your relative that promised you to assist you on something, does not turn up or cancels the last minute.



# Scenario

Mary is Victor's spouse, who is diagnosed with dementia. Mary has an appointment, and she is leaving the house. At that moment, Victor says that he cannot find his medicines and that he cannot be alone. Mary thinks that she cannot leave him on each one anymore. She starts feeling unhappy.

What do you think that Mary should do?

1. Search the medicine
2. Tell Victor to be more careful in the future
3. Tell Victor that he cannot help me now and leave
4. Consider that Victor has dementia, and it is expected to act like this. Then help him and go to her appointment.

# Bear in mind

- By trying to think differently, **new perspectives** of dealing with the events will prompt and the feeling will also change.
- The way you feel will change as soon as you change your thoughts
- The event as an event, cannot determine your feelings (sad, miserable, angry or happy)



# Which thoughts may help the carers to feel better? Choose

1. Thinking that dementia is a neurological disease
2. Thinking that no one knows how difficult it is
3. Thinking that no one can provide the proper care as me
4. If my relatives are not happy, that means that I am a bad carer
5. Thinking that my person with dementia will become better
6. Thinking that help from others will assist me in my carer responsibilities
7. Thinking that saving time for self care, will help me provide a better care to my spouse

# Learn a new way

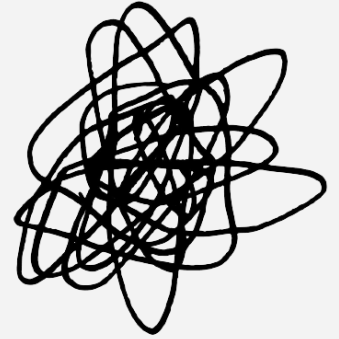
## Learning a new way of thinking is a training for the brain

### Helpful ways of doing so:

1. Rethink and try to reframe those unhelpful thoughts
2. Train again your brain by proving it wrong (prove your bad estimations as wrong)
3. Make a mantra and repeat it



# Unhelpful thoughts by the carers



- I am sure that other carers are better than me
- If you are not a carer you don't understand how difficult it is
- My mother doesn't care about me anymore
- I can't handle my time for my family
- My sister or my brother cannot offer the same care to our father as me
- I am on my own and I must do everything alone
- My brother is not happy anymore and I think that it is because I am a bad carer

# Helpful thoughts by the carers



- It is okay to take time to relax as it will help me to provide a good standard of care.
- Sharing my feelings with others helps to take the pressure off.
- Asking for help from others can help me to share the burden of care.
- Making time for myself helps me to provide better care.
- Dementia is a disease; it is not my or anyone else's fault.
- I do not have to give others their way all the time.
- Other:

# An activity with a carer

**Describe the event that made you feel distressed.**

I live with my mother. Last week, my sister came to visit our mother and me from abroad. When she left, I asked my mother if she enjoyed the day. She couldn't remember what we did that day. She wanted to rest and watch TV.

**Can you recognize your unhelpful thoughts? Name them.**

My mother cannot remember anything anymore. Dementia has ruined her.

**What would the helpful thought be?**

She has a great day, she laughed, she enjoyed the food and the dessert, and this is what counts.

**The helpful thoughts, how could they make you feel?**

I would have felt happy about the visit and the day we had the three of us after a long time.

# Activity

**Think of an event, a recent one that made you feel distressed.**

**Answer the questions below**

- **Describe the event that made you feel distressed.**
- Can you recognize your unhelpful thoughts? Name them.
- What would the helpful thought be?
- The helpful thoughts, how could they make you feel?

# Keep in mind

**Change your mindset is a form of practice**

**Change your unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones to feel better**

**You can change your response, not what happened**

# Summary

- Carers need psychoeducation, counseling or group meetings where they will have the opportunity to share some thoughts and listen to others.
- Being a carer can be very stressful and demanding.
- Promoting self-care will be beneficial for them as well for the person with dementia.

**Any Questions ?**