

Self Management Toolbox

Stress Techniques

Dr. Dunc: “Stress makes leaky brakes even leakier so getting some relaxation tools into our toolbox is going to be very important. Um, relaxation tools can help in many different ways. In terms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder you the know, the more we fight against those leaky thoughts, the more they get stuck and so using relaxation tools allows those thoughts to float away and allows us to shift easier. When it comes to rage or a full beaker, relaxation tools help empty that beaker. But when it comes to tics or leaky brakes over your movements or noises um, the more you use relaxation tools to get rid of stress, the more you’re robbing those tics of the fuel that’s really driving them. The nice thing about relaxation tools is that they’re very mobile. You can take them anywhere with you and use them at any time. The one very simple and, and, and easy relaxation technique we teach in the Brake Shop is called deep breathing. Now when I was first becoming a doctor I learned about deep breathing for the first time reading about it in the text book and I thought it was kind of insulting when they said breathing differently would help with leaky brakes. C’mon I’ve got a real problem here. Don’t, ah, don’t insult me. But you know what? I really missed out. Ah, I don’t want you to make the same mistake I did. I, I ended up not using deep breathing for years because of that and yet it ended up being one of the most powerful tools I ever learned. So don’t make the same mistake I did. Um, let’s see an example of what deep breathing can look like.”

Kim: (Girl sitting on yoga mat breathing deeply from the chest and shoulders several times then begins gasping) “This is so ridiculous! I don’t feel relaxed!”

Dr. Dunc: “That was terrible! No wonder she’s still feeling stressed. And no wonder she doesn’t realize yet how valuable a tool relaxation can be. Kim needs to do a few things differently. For one, she either needs to sit up straighter or she needs to lie down so that her airway isn’t bent, um, and not putting extra strain then on her body. Um, now, sitting ramrod straight also isn’t very relaxing and so it’s, it’s just a matter of sitting with dignity. Another thing is that did you notice how tense she was? She needs to relax a bit; those shoulders were really up. She needs to just let the shoulders drop and her arms hang wherever they end up. Thirdly, she should breathe in slowly counting to five while she does it, ah, without holding her breath. And then she’ll need to breath out again to a count of five and then maybe just uh, sit and, and rest for a count of five, just paying attention to um, what her entire body is feeling like. So, in for five, out for five, and resting for five. That’s the breathing triangle. Let’s see her try that again.”

Kim: (breathing slower and a little deeper from the chest)

Dr. Dunc: "Ok that was better uh, but did you see that Kim's shoulders were still lifting with each breath? Also, now that she was sitting straighter, I noticed that she was breathing with her chest. Perhaps the most important habit to unlearn when you're doing deep breathing is to breathe in and out with your belly rather than with your chest. Uh, breathing with your belly automatically slows down your breathing because you can fit a lot more air down here than up here, plus it takes less time to breathe back and forth between your mouth and your chest; it takes longer to get down to your belly and back up so that slows your breathing down too. All right Kim, third time's a charm."

Kim: (breathing deeply and slowly from the belly using the breathing triangle technique)

Dr. Dunc: "Now she's got it. Did you see how now it was her belly moving in and out rather than her chest? Also, it was pretty clear that she was focused now on nothing but her breathing. Now, when you're trying it you may want to picture yourself um, blowing up a balloon in your tummy so each time you breathe in the balloon is inflating and each time you breathe out the balloon is deflating. That or, or other images in your head can be pretty helpful. Um, for example, imagining a place you find very calm and peaceful like, uh, well, being at the water with the sun shining on you. Or, uh lying on the grass with a, a favourite person or, or pet. Um, or, you know when you're breathing in you can imagine that breath going to that, that area that's really sore, or, or, or hard for you right now. Um, when it comes to tics, I like to imagine when I'm breathing in, that air is capturing that urge to tic in a bubble. And then when I breathe out, I'm blowing that bubble out with the urge still trapped in it so I'm blowing the urge away and away. Um, you know, rather than counting to yourself as you um, as you do deep breathing you may want to repeat phrases to yourself. Thing like 'this moment' or 'this breath' or 'I'm safe, I'm safe;' whatever you'd like. After trying the breathing triangle every day for a while think about how it's changed your mood, if at all, and, and talk to your cheerleader about how deep breathing affects your body and, and even your head. Now, if you're finding that deep breathing is really annoying or, or hard to do, that might be because your body's actually forgotten how to relax, it's been tense so long. If that's the case, there is a trick we've got in the toolbox for resetting those muscles and, and that is to pick an area of your body to start, uh like one area at a time. Let's say you start with your arms, tensing them really, really, really hard and then letting it go. Now, just like uh taking an elastic that's already tight and stretching it further and then letting it go, it allows your muscles to go limp, and, uh, re-teach your body how relaxation is supposed to feel. Now, there are other relaxation tools you can look into like mindfulness meditation or yoga. Now myself, I think I know how I'm going to relax this afternoon....so...I'm Dr. Dunc...shoo, go on, stick that, stick that tool in your toolbox."