

Learning to Stress Well. Remembering to Breathe¹

By Mary Elaine Kiener

A funny thing happened on my way to this article: I “forgot” about breathing. At the end of the previous article, I wrote that we would next explore “sensing”. It was only once I began writing that I realized I had totally “skipped over” breathing—which comes right between “Self-Responsibility and Love” and “Sensing”—on the 12-dimensional Wellness Wheel that serves as the foundation for this series of articles.

With that realization, I momentarily forgot once again about breathing. This time, my breath was literally frozen-in-place, precariously perched between inhale and exhale, with the knowledge my error was now frozen-in-print. So, first things first: exhale...

I briefly considered my options: a) ignore the mistake, hoping no one notices; b) follow the mistaken order, knowing that most would remain unaware of the discrepancy. A fresh tug-of-war inside (either way, my inner perfectionist would ALWAYS know) began without benefit of breathing. Once more, exhale... Then, with my next breath, I am laughing, filled with delight, plus a perfect story to share about my ever-present journey of learning to stress well.

Simply put, when experiencing even mild stress, I often hold my breath. I used to need reminders to breathe: first, during yoga classes, then, massages, even when receiving hugs from friends! I “forget” how to breathe if my face gets underwater (i.e., panic!) and with sleep apnea, I occasionally stop breathing when I sleep. This was certainly not the first time I had forgotten about breathing nor is it likely to be the last.

Grant Soosalu, author of *mBraining - Using your multiple brains to do cool stuff* teaches a lovely, brief exercise to use whenever we find ourselves getting stressed, angry, or frightened: “Stop, take a breath for 2 seconds in, and 10 seconds out. Repeat 5 times. This will quickly calm you down. Then begin to breathe for 6 (approx.) seconds in, 6 seconds out. This is called Balanced Breathing, and requires the inbreath and outbreath to be of the same duration, and will bring the Autonomic Nervous System into balance.”

Throughout the years, as I began learning to stress well, I discerned patterns of “not letting go” throughout several areas of my life. I discovered how to “simply notice what is here now, without the need to change anything”. Now, I more easily embrace whatever life brings my way by softening into presence with what IS, rather than grabbing hold and holding on for dear life.

Meanwhile, I am so grateful for the many times my body continues to breathe--whether I consciously remember or not--on average, 12 times each minute, 720 times per hour, 17,280 per day, 6,307,200 per year. Wow! Almost takes one’s breath away, doesn’t it? By the way, next time (I promise), we WILL explore “sensing”.

www.askmehouse.com me@askmehouse.com

¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, February). Learning to stress well. Remembering to Breathe. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.