

**COPING WITH STRESS FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS
THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER HEALTHY LIFESTYLE
PROGRAM**

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Guided imagery can be downloaded from: <http://hr.web.cmu.edu/current/ld/supplemental/>

The following provides information and techniques to help you increase your ability to cope with stress. We cannot make the stress in your life go away but we can change the way your brain responds to stress. By being better able to cope with stress you will have less of an elevation of stress hormones. It is the elevation of the stress hormones that alters your mental and physical health.

I'M STRESSED OUT!

YEAH, WELL I'M MORE STRESSED THAN YOU ARE!!

How many times do we hear people speaking like this, almost as if being under a lot of stress is a badge of honor. However, stress should be classified along with being overweight, being sedentary rather than physically fit, having high blood pressure, and being a smoker, for its DANGER TO HEALTH. It would be wonderful to be able to say that you have stress in your life but that you use the behaviors and techniques we will teach you as the badge of honor so that you will be a healthy lifestyle role model for other adults and children.

Questions and Answers:

Q: What is stress?

- Stress results when something that happens to you or something that you observe exceeds the capability of your mind to deal with the event effectively.
- When you believe that you cannot cope with the demands or perceived consequences of the event stress-reactive areas of your brain become activated and the concentration of stress hormones in blood increases
- The mental and physical health effects of stress are due to the elevation of stress hormones that occurs when the stress reactive areas of the brain are activated
- Coping with stress means that you use behaviors and techniques to keep the stress reactive areas of the brain calm

Q: What are the effects of stress on the mind?

- You have difficulty thinking clearly and focusing
- You become depressed and have the 'blues
- Your ability to remember things may decrease at a younger age than would occur if you could cope with stress

Q: What are the effects of stress on the body?

- your heart beats more rapidly
- blood pressure increases

- there is an accelerated accumulation of cholesterol into the blood vessels of the heart with narrowing of the blood vessels
- blood platelets clump together and may plug up a blood vessel in the heart
- the ability of the body to resist infectious disease decreases
- the ability of the body to heal wounds decreases
- autoimmune diseases such as psoriasis, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and inflammatory bowel disease may become more active.
- your skin becomes sweaty
- diabetes is more difficult to manage
- weight is more difficult to manage because you tend to eat foods that are not healthy

Q: Is stress always bad?

A: Some aspects of the stress response are not always bad. If you were stressed because you saw a tiger running toward you, the changes in your body would help you flee to safety. Indeed, the response of the body to stress may be to increase the chance of escaping from danger.

Q: If stress is capable of impairing our health why not just avoid it? For example, if someone is worried about being overweight they don't have to eat foods that are high in saturated fats.

A: Sometimes we can avoid stress. If we know that someone is angry with us, we can avoid seeing them until they calm down. However, much of life's stress is unavoidable. Divorce, losing one's job, an angry employer, children that get into trouble, caring for a relative with a serious disease, preparing for an exam at school, are all examples of stress that cannot be avoided.

Q: Is there more stress today than in past years?

A: It doesn't matter whether there is more or less stress. What is important is whether your brain perceives events as stress.

Q: If stress cannot be avoided is there a way that I can change the way my brain perceives stress to minimize the negative effect of stress on health?

A: Yes, there is. We call it the development of "coping skills" that minimize the activation of the stress reactive areas of the brain. People who incorporate the coping skills into their lives will have less stressor induced alteration of their health than individuals who do not. The principal buffers are:

- **Having a social support system that you enjoy and can depend upon. Friends are important; being lonely may increase the risk of disease development.**
- **Being optimistic that things will go well for you and those problems that occur will not alter your basic belief that you are a good and well-liked person. Always feeling that you are responsible when things go wrong can increase your chance of becoming depressed and developing heart disease and diabetes.**
- **Having a sense of humor so that you can find amusement in events and can even laugh at yourself (remember the old saying that "laughter is the best medicine").**
- **Being physically fit as appropriate for your age, rather than being sedentary. This does not mean you have to go to a gym and work**

out. What you need to do is to increase the amount of walking you do.

- **Enjoy participating in religious activities or having a spiritual nature that allows you to relax and calm yourself when faced with stress**

A way many people have found helpful to remember the behaviors that are important is to think of the word **RELAX**:

Reflection: Enjoying participation in spiritual or religious activities, or simply taking time to reflect on the things that add meaning, purpose, and joy to your life helps to reduce the negative influence of stress on health

Expectations: Being high in optimism, seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty helps to reduce the negative influence of stress on health

Laughter: Having a sense of humor and being able to laugh at some of the things you do helps to reduce the negative influence of stress on health

Acquaintances: Being socially active and spending time with people you enjoy being with helps to reduce the negative influence of stress on health

Xercise: Being physically active (walking as often as you can) and not just sitting around watching television or playing games on a computer helps to reduce the negative influence of stress on health

Q: Why is it important to be concerned about coping with stress?

A: If we do not utilize the behaviors that can help to reduce the influence of stress on health, we increase our likelihood of developing illness. We may then turn to the health care establishment to take care of us. However, if we are to be more responsible for the quality of our own health by eating a healthy diet, managing our weight, exercising, and not smoking, we need to also be aware of how we cope with stress. Indeed, the more we do to keep ourselves healthy, the more likely it will be that we will go through the aging process being less dependent on care provided by others, we will maintain our joy of life and enjoy our families and friends and not be a burden to them, and be able to contribute to the joy of others.

We also know that our demise is shorter the longer we stay healthy as we go thru the aging process. Living a long healthy life without chronic illness, pain, and suffering, and then dying suddenly or after a brief illness is the blessing.

Q: Let's be realistic. There is nothing that I can do about the stress in my life. It is not going to go away. What can I do?

A: We can not change the stress in your life. What we can do is provide you with behaviors that will change the way that your brain responds to stress. The important things that we are concerned about are the hormones that increase in concentration in your blood when you are under stress. The behaviors that we will train you to do will help to minimize the hormonal elevation induced by stress. Some of the benefits that result by increasing your ability to cope with stress:

- Greater peace of mind
- More patience
- Less anger
- Fewer temper outbursts
- Better interpersonal communication
- More harmonious relations with family members
- Improved parenting skills
- More restful sleep
- Decreased use of medications for pain
- Decreased use of medications for sleep
- Decreased use of medications for anxiety
- Decreased or ceased cigarette smoking
- Weight loss
- Greater acceptance of aspects of life over which you have no control
- Improvement in sense of well-being
- Better ability to manage difficulties
- An improved self-confidence during stressful situations
- An improved ability to concentrate
- Less muscle tension
- Lower blood pressure
- Slower heart rate
- Better immune function
- Less risk of heart disease
- Less risk of stroke
- Less risk of viral infection
- Less risk of autoimmune disease
- A less aggressive course to autoimmune diseases and possibly cancer
- Better ability to think clearly
- Greater enjoyment of people and things
- Less depression

Q: I am concerned with my ability to cope with stress. What can I do about it?

A: There are behaviors that you can use to decrease the impact of stress on your health. The behaviors are discussed below.

Techniques to calm your mind and improve the quality of your mental and physical health when experiencing an **ACUTE STRESS** (one that is unanticipated, has sudden onset, and short duration):

- Deep breathing
- Thinking of funny things
- Chanting

Techniques to help you cope with **CHRONIC STRESS** that will improve the quality of your mental and physical health (the stress of daily life events):

- Writing
- Guided Imagery
- Meditation

However, before going on there is a question we would like you to answer:

In general, would you say that your health is?

EXCELLENT

VERY GOOD

GOOD

FAIR

POOR

After answering, go to the next page:

If you answered the question FAIR or POOR, it is more likely that you will have medical problems in the coming years than if you answered EXCELLENT, VERY GOOD, or GOOD.

If you answered FAIR or POOR, we believe that your practicing the skills that will help you cope with stress, will increase your optimism and change you into someone who believes that the quality of their health is excellent, very good, or good.

DEEP BREATHING FOR CALMING YOURSELF WHEN EXPERIENCING AN ACUTE STRESSOR

The following focuses on a technique that you will be able to use to calm your mind, reduce the concentration of stress hormones in your blood, and contribute to an enhancement of your health.

You use this technique when something happens that you find disturbing and you feel an increased amount of anxiety and stress. This techniques will help to rapidly calm you, help you to think more clearly, and to focus on what you are doing. It is even helpful for children who are having difficulty keeping calm.

Q: What is abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing?

A: This is a way that you can rapidly increase the amount of oxygen in your blood to a much greater extent than occurs when you take a breath by expanding the wall of your chest. When you take an abdominal breath and increase the amount of oxygen in your blood, your brain will detect the increased oxygen and will respond by decreasing the concentration of stress hormones in the blood.

The diaphragm separates the abdominal and chest cavities. Pushing the wall of your abdomen out causes the diaphragm to drop further than when you merely expand your chest wall to take in air. This increases the space that the lungs can expand into and increases the amount of air and oxygen that is inhaled. As we age, however, most of us take more shallow breaths and get less oxygen into our blood than we are capable of.

Q: What is the difference between abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing and chest breathing?

A: Breathing from the chest delivers approximately a teacup of air to the lungs (about 500 ml), breathing from the abdomen can deliver as much as 8 times the amount of air to the lungs. This makes a huge difference in the amount of oxygen in the blood

How we breathe also has an impact on our nervous system. Less oxygen stimulates the production of shorter, more “restless” beta waves in the brain. More oxygen stimulates the longer, slower alpha waves associated with relaxation and calm mind states. For this reason, breathing from the abdomen is helpful in eliciting relaxation and protecting the body from the harmful effects of stress.

Q: Abdominal breathing is difficult. How do I learn to breathe this way?

A: You’re right. It is hard to change the way you breathe. Practice! You’ve had a lifetime of breathing incorrectly; it will take a while to learn to breathe correctly. Breathing is generally easier to practice initially when lying down, so practice at home lying down or sitting up.

Use the following to learn how to increase the volume of air flowing into the lungs. The essential point is that by pushing the abdominal wall out, the diaphragm will drop, increasing the space that the lungs can expand into. This maximizes the flow of air into the lungs and of oxygen into the blood.

Techniques for learning abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing (on our web site - healthylifestyle.upmc.com - under stress coping and relaxation techniques, there is a video that will demonstrate the deep breathing technique):

1. Put your right hand on your abdomen, right at the navel, and put your left hand on your chest, right in the center. You may find it helpful to close your eyes.
2. Take a deeper inhalation than usual and focus on the rising of the abdomen as the lungs fill with air and the diaphragm flattens down, causing the belly to rise. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in, and falling about an inch as you breathe out.
3. Most of the movement should be in the lower hand; the other hand on the chest moves only slightly.
4. The trick to shifting from chest to abdominal breathing is to make one or two full exhalations (pushes air out from bottom of lung, creating a vacuum that will pull in an abdominal breath on your next inhalation), pause, then inhale slowly.
5. Nostril breathing is generally recommended but if you are more comfortable breathing through your mouth, do so.
6. You should not take more than five deep breaths. If you feel a little dizzy, take fewer deep breaths.

It is important to emphasize that one needs to practice this technique to increase its effectiveness. Remember, it is impossible to take deep breaths if you are holding your stomach in.

Important:

- Use this technique of breathing when you experience something that is upsetting to you. Do your regular breathing at other times.
- If you experience an acute stressor that lasts for several hours, only use abdominal breathing intermittently, not all the time. Take 3-5 deep breaths to calm yourself and then breathe regularly. When you again feel anxious, take 3-5 deep breaths.

HUMOR FOR CALMING YOURSELF WHEN EXPERIENCING AN ACUTE STRESSOR

Another way to rapidly calm yourself when experiencing an acute stressor is to find something to laugh about. Of course when you are being stressed it is difficult to think of something funny, so it is a good idea to have something ready. To do this find some calm time and think of some things that make you laugh. It may be an episode of a TV show, a movie, or things you have experienced. Select 3-5 memories that make you laugh and store them away in your mind. You can call the place in your mind where you keep your funny memories your “funny relaxer”. Then when something is upsetting you and causing stress and you don’t feel like doing deep breathing, go to your “funny relaxer” and lighten up as you chuckle to yourself.

CHANTING FOR CALMING YOURSELF WHEN EXPERIENCING AN ACUTE STRESSOR

Another technique that we have found to be effective to help reduce the response to an acute stress is to say a brief relaxing chant to yourself. The chant can be a religious phrase or just a few words, such as “I am a good person”, or, “All will be well”, or “I will be well”.

After deciding on the words you will use you set them to a simple tune, one that you find pleasant or one that has a religious feeling to it, such as the tune of a Gregorian chant.

First chant your phrase quietly. Do this several times. Then do it without making any sound. While you are doing this feel calm, relaxed, and comfortable. Practice this for several days, quietly saying your chant to yourself while being in a relaxed state. We want your mind to associate the chant with a relaxed feeling.

Now, when you experience an acute stress say the chant silently to yourself. Notice how this relaxes and calms you and allows you to focus.

At different times of experience with stress you may decide to take a few deep breaths, go to your “funny relaxer”, or do your chant. All may be effective for you, or just one or two of them. Decide what works best for you. Use what is effective to calm you.

WRITING ABOUT WHAT BOTHERS YOU TO BRING CALMNESS AND RELAXATION

Interestingly, writing can contribute to the prevention of illness and help you move ahead by reducing the anxiety associated with things that are of concern to you. The technique that we are going to ask you to use is different than keeping a daily diary, often called "Journaling". You can use the following to write about things that have bothered you for years or something that occurred yesterday and is bothering you. It looks simple to do, and it is. However, the effects are usually dramatic.

Take a sheet of paper and something to write with. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for 15 minutes.

- Pick any issue of concern to you to write about
- The only rule is that you write continuously for 15 minutes. If you run out of things to say, just repeat what you have already written. Don’t worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure.
- While writing DO NOT READ what you have already written
- Do not be concerned if you start crying while writing, it is common for this to happen.
- Your writing is completely confidential. **When you finish writing, tear up what you have written and toss it out so that no one will ever see what you wrote.**
- If you find it helpful you can write 3-4 times a week.

AN ADDITIONAL WRITING EXERCISE YOU MAY WANT TO TRY:

Each day, or whenever you wish, write about something you are grateful for. It may be as few or many words as you want. Then whenever you are feeling "blue", think about some of the things that you are grateful for.

GUIDED IMAGERY TO HELP YOUR MIND COOL DOWN

Q: What is guided imagery?

A: Guided imagery is a script that someone reads and you listen to that directs you to create beautiful and comfortable thoughts and pictures in your mind where temperature, smell, sounds, beauty, people, sights, are comfortable and relaxing. Somewhat similar to a wonderful vacation taken without going anywhere (and achieving some of the same relaxing benefits without having to return home and wait for a long time for your luggage at the airport baggage claim). Guided imagery is used for relaxation and healing.

Q: How does guided imagery help calm the mind?

A: The thoughts that are disturbing to you are set aside and your brain can calm itself. Guided imagery helps to create a sense of peace and tranquility.

Q: Are there other advantages to guided imagery?

A: Guided imagery has also proved effective in patients as an aid to healing. Studies have indicated that encouraging patients to listen to imagery during anesthesia induction and/or medical or surgical procedures has decreased anxiety and stress levels significantly. It has been demonstrated to reduce the need for analgesic medication of hospitalized patients, thus reducing side effects and decreasing the recovery time frame.

Q: How can I do guided imagery?

A: There are many tapes and CD's available. On our web site - healthy lifestyle.upmc.com - under stress coping and relaxation techniques, there are guided imagery's for you to listen to.

MEDITATION - A TECHNIQUE THAT MAY BE EFFECTIVE FOR HELPING YOU TO RELAX

We now want to add another technique to your repertoire of what you can do to increase your ability of coping with stress. The material that we are providing to you may not work for you. Everyone is different. Not everyone likes modern art, or a New York strip steak, or Sushi, or starch in their shirts, or tan khaki pants. All we can do is hope that enough participants find the information that we are providing life changing so that as a result you will not only achieve a better quality of mental and physical health but you will also help others to achieve the same.

Before teaching you how to meditate we need to clarify some things. There are books and courses taught by experts who study meditation and how to teach the technique to others. Multiple sessions of training have the advantage of giving you practice and providing you with different approaches to meditation with the expectation that you will find one that works for you.

We are going to give you an adequate amount of information and technique so that you can meditate. It may be all that you need now that you have apparently made a commitment to work to achieve a better quality of mental and physical health.

Q: What is meditation?

A: Meditation is a technique to take your attention and focus it on something that has no emotional value to you. This will contribute to lowering the concentration of the stress hormones in your blood. Meditation will train your mind to become less responsive to stress and will result in physiologic changes that counteract the harmful effects of stress throughout the day.

Q: What is the goal of the meditation?

A: It is to find a way for you to **NOT** pay attention to thoughts that you find disturbing (such thoughts will activate the stress pathways in your brain). Therefore, you will want to train your mind to briefly clear disturbing thoughts from your mind.

Interestingly, when we want to increase muscle strength we use our muscles. In fact, most of what we do to achieve better health involves using our bodies to achieve better heart, lung, and muscle strength. However, to achieve a healthier relationship between our mind and our body, we want to relax our mind. Interestingly, to do so requires that we use our mind. It is possible that activation of some areas of the brain leads to a decreased activity of the areas of the brain that respond to stress.

Q: Is there a trick to get me to stop thinking about things that disturb me?

A: When you are trying to relax your mind and an intrusive thought enters, focusing your attention on a word, phrase, sound, or repetitive movement (such as achieved with Tai chi) helps you to temporarily let go of the invading thought. It is important that for a few minutes you focus on the neutral event rather than the thoughts that are bothersome to you. Knowing that there is nothing that you are going to do about a thought that is disturbing you will help in letting the thought go.

Q: Will I learn to do this quickly?

A: Probably not. You must practice and repeat the techniques being taught to you. If you have taken piano lessons, you know that without practice your mind could not get your fingers to where you wanted them to be. Your mind gets better with practice. The more you practice relaxing your mind, the easier and more effective it will become.

Q: Is there a reason that I should be concerned about doing this?

A: No, learning to relax will not make you a less effective person or negatively affect your work performance. In fact, learning to relax will make you more efficient in your everyday life, increase your feeling of being calm, and will enable you to interact with others better.

Q: Can learning how to meditate help me in my everyday life?

A: Yes, you will notice that you are comfortable when you are aware of the following, whereas you may not have been comfortable before practicing meditation:

- Slowing down, not trying to do multiple things at once
- Bringing your full awareness to what you are doing at any given time. Your mind will wander less.

Q: It sounds to me as if praying can be considered a form of meditation

A: It can and is.

Meditation technique:

- Find a quiet place where you can sit and be comfortable (it is important that you are comfortable so that you are not disturbed by thoughts of being uncomfortable)
- Make sure your clothes are comfortable and that your belt or shoes or underwear are not uncomfortable
- Find a place that is quiet so that you are not disturbed by noise or trying to listen to something that you may suddenly find interesting
- Select a word that you will use as a focus of your attention. The word should not have any meaning to you. Some examples are PEACE, QUIET, RELAX, SMOOTH, REST

- You will also pay attention to your breathing. You will focus your attention on your breath as you inhale (through your mouth or nose, whichever is more comfortable) and exhale (again, through your mouth or nose)
- Remember, that meditation is a trick (I'm sure meditation teachers will not be happy with me) that for a few minutes helps you focus on a neutral event rather than thoughts that are bothersome to you. Knowing that there is nothing that you are going to do about the thought that is disturbing you for the brief time that you are trying to relax, will help in letting the thought go.
- The importance of the word and paying attention to your breathing is to get your attention away from the thoughts that are disturbing to you
- Allowing your brain (not the whole brain but primarily the stress reactive areas of the brain) to relax for a few minutes will help you achieve more calmness and lower levels of stress hormones with health benefits
- Have a clock placed so that you can see it
- Sit, be comfortable, you can close your eyes or leave them open, whatever you prefer
- Periodically look at the clock so that you do this for about 15 minutes (if you meditate with your eyes closed you will have to open them to look at the clock)
- Begin by sitting quietly, being aware of when you slowly inhale and slowly exhale, and think your word to yourself while you exhale
- If while you are doing this a thought comes into your mind, consciously direct your attention back to your breathing and your word
- Do this for 15 minutes daily while you are learning and then at least 3 times a week when you are comfortable and you find the technique is easy for you to do

Q: Can I get a book or take a class on meditation?

A: Of course, if what you have just done is helpful and you would like to explore whether meditation can be made more comfortable for you to do, please, buy a book, video, or attend a class.

Remember: Some people like to play the piano and others the violin. Some like to play football and others squash. People differ in the behaviors that are comfortable and enjoyable for them. You will find that we offer a variety of behaviors for you to use to help you cope with stress. This provides you with the opportunity to pick those that are comfortable and enjoyable for you. You do not need to use them all, rather you need to find what works for you so that it is something that you will use.

You must practice and repeat the techniques being taught to you. Your mind gets better with practice. The more you practice relaxing your mind, the easier and more effective it will become. It may take as long as 8 weeks before you begin to feel comfortable with meditation and realize that the technique is helping you to feel calm. Don't give up by being disappointed if you do not feel that the technique is working for you.

Something else that I would like you to do:

- **PLEASE GET OUT AND GO FOR A WALK!**
- **DO IT EVERY DAY!**
- **DO IT WHENEVER YOU CAN!**

IT IS UP TO YOU. YOU CAN USE THE ABOVE BEHAVIORS TO HELP KEEP YOURSELF MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY HEALTHY. YOU WILL BENEFIT ALONG WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND COWORKERS.

IN ADDITION, REMEMBER THAT KEEPING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE, EATING A NUTRITIOUS DIET, NOT BEING OVERWEIGHT, AND NOT SMOKING, ARE IMPORTANT PARTS OF KEEPING YOURSELF HEALTHY.

ALSO, THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIORS ARE REPEATED FROM ABOVE AS THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR BEING HEALTHY:

- **Have a social support system that you enjoy and can depend upon**
- **Be optimistic that things will go well for you and those problems that occur will not alter your basic belief that you are a good and well-liked person**
- **Have a sense of humor so that you can find amusement in events and can even laugh at yourself (remember the old saying that “laughter is the best medicine”)**
- **Be physically fit as appropriate for your age, rather than being sedentary**
- **Be religious or spiritual**

Let's do this question again.

In general, would you say that your health is?

EXCELLENT VERY GOOD GOOD FAIR POOR

Remember, if you answered the question FAIR or POOR, it is more likely that you will have medical problems in the coming years than if you answered EXCELLENT, VERY GOOD, or GOOD.

TESTIMONIALS

- I practice the things I've learned regularly from belly breathing (my favorite, to smiling more, taking myself to a calm place and just moving around move (exercising).
- As soon as I feel stressed, I think oh I need to belly breathe and I do and instantly it helps to calm me.
- I've noticed that I'm spending more time with friends and laughing more.
- I share what I learn with EVERYONE.
- I do not notice stress like I did before applying the techniques.
- I give credit to my class for saving my relationship at home. It is amazing how important it is to breathe and walk away from a situation when one get's really angry and hurt.
- I have already experienced relief physically and emotionally from changes in my breathing alone.
- I went to my counselor yesterday; she said because of my stress techniques, it is NOT necessary to continue our sessions any longer. WOW! This should say it all.
- The 15 minute writing method is a great way of screaming silently. I plan on using this method quite often.
- I know I feel better organized and better able to handle anything that is "thrown" at me at work and at home.
- The class has taught me to use stress management techniques proactively instead of reactively. I still have stress in my life and in the workplace, but I am in control of my response to it.
- At home I've been sharing what I've learned with my family, neighbors and at church.
- I am able to breathe when I get upset and not respond so quickly with out thinking
- This past week I had a hospital procedure, as I lay on the operating table I was feeling anxious. Automatically I began to breathe and visualize. The procedure was done before I knew it and I realized how effective and useful the techniques I learned were.
- I sleep better, and can now reduce my reaction to stressful situations. This has also opened my eyes as to how detrimental stress is to our bodies, and our ability to maintain a greater quality of life as we age.
- In my opinion, *everyone* should have the opportunity to experience this training.
- The classes have taught me invaluable skills that will continue to enrich and enhance not only the quality of my existence, but also that of my family. I wish this opportunity had come to me earlier in life.
- The littlest things would stress me out and I would say things that I really didn't want to say out loud and I use to be very impatient. I have learned to be way more laid back and to walk away and take a couple deep breaths
- One of my favorite things that I was taught was the writing lesson. It has always been a challenge for me to tell people how I felt and I would usually write them a letter. But when I learned to write my anger out and then rip it out it made me feel so much better.
- Sometimes our jobs do create stress within our lives. Being able to recognize these stresses and manage them help us to be more productive in our jobs and our home life.
- Your class has helped me to cope with stresses of everyday life, and I will continue to use the strategies for wellness that you have shown me. I am richer for having had this experience.
- Benefits that I've experienced : much less aggressive driving ; less bothered by rush hour traffic; able to be calmer in interactions with others; better listener; able through deep breathing to reduce post surgical back pain; and improved sleep.
- Before going to sleep I use the guided imagery.
- I am able to fall asleep easier and I don't wake up in the middle of the night as often. (And if I do wake up, I am able to fall asleep again.)
- I have fewer "down" times which don't last as long.

- My blood pressure which was regularly around 120/80 is now down to 100/74.
- In addition to the “advertised” benefits, I have had other positive side effects. I have had no cold sores (which I used to have almost constantly).
- I have greatly improved my relationships with my family and friends, and almost nothing which goes wrong seems to be a big deal to me anymore.
- I have noticed less of a need to eat sweet and salty snacks and an increased desire to walk and move around.
- I am teaching the techniques to my friend who has MS. She is falling asleep much easier and she has been able to handle her busy life with more energy and fewer flare-ups.
- At first I was hesitant about the “Wellness” Program that was offered to us, I knew I was stressed out, but I never thought anything could be done about it. Now I know it was truly a blessing and that the participants are truly thankful that this program has been offered to us, a wonderful “Gift”.
- Just taking a few seconds to do something as easy as “breathing” can make such a difference in your day to ease the stressors. I also find myself enjoying the “moment” more often, taking the time to appreciate situations that are very important in my life.
- I have taken the knowledge I received and have taught it to my husband who was very reluctant at first, but now I see him taking a few seconds to breathe before he deals with difficult situations, I even got him to “Write
- Learning to breathe has helped me with stressful situations at home and at work.
- At home, these techniques have helped me relate better with my children.
- I find myself continually using the deep breathing technique to get me through excessively busy times both at work and at home and deal with situations more calmly.
- At work I am not as reactionary and I feel I am able to make better, more thoughtful decisions
- At home I am currently the primary care taker for my elderly parent who has Alzheimer’s. I find that the class is helping me cope much better. I am able to let other family members know that I need help in a thoughtful more constructive way.
- I forget to just breathe at times, and I didn’t realize the impact this had on my health. I am now focusing on my breathing, which I needed with a busy schedule and the demands of a 10 month old baby.
- By using guided imagery, I have begun to “permit” myself to take time to think about myself...and not work, family, etc...In doing so, I have begun to work on some of the issues that I have “uncovered”.
- One of my main realizations has been that I don’t GIVE myself the time to relax! I’m always focused on some problem of the day. By realizing this, I have been providing myself the time to THINK about the things that are IMPORTANT to ME in my life. By giving myself this time to reflect, I have avoided making hasty decisions that would affect both my professional and personal lives. I feel that I have more of an overall sense of “well-being”.
- I can not express enough what a difference this class has made in my overall life.
- You introduced us to deep breathing and it has changed the way I got about my daily life. It has given me a tool to calm myself down in the most stressful situations (dealing with three young kids, sickness, etc). It’s amazing that we all have the ability to do this and the results are so quick and profound.
- I have a 5 year old son and I use the "blowing out the candles" technique with him. It does work, many times he forgets what he was upset about by the time he is done. He and I have deal that he will do this, but I must do it too when he sees me upset and he loves to remind me to "blow out the candles".

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO OTHERS
PLEASE E-MAIL THEM TO: hlp@upmc.edu