

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

Self Care: Relaxation Techniques

We all have instances of pain and stress in our lives that can result in physical, mental or emotional issues. Often these symptoms are recognized by us as physical or emotional pain that can significantly impact our health, happiness and overall quality of life.

The Pain Cycle

Perhaps the first step to healing ourselves is learning to better understand how our body reacts and deals with stress and pain. Once pain occurs, whether from an injury or other source, your psychological reaction to it can have a strong effect on its intensity and duration. For some people, pain can become a vicious cycle: pain causes anxiety and tension, and anxiety and tension cause more pain. Many common health disorders, such as migraines, involve tension as a contributing source of the initial pain. By utilizing relaxation techniques, one can release tension and greatly reduce certain types of pain and actually prevent them from occurring. Relaxation techniques, such as meditation or breathing exercises, are simple methods you can use yourself to relax and break your pain cycle.

Meditation as Medicine

Meditation is an activity that can calm your mind and keep you focused on the present. In a

meditative state, you can clear your mind of cluttered thoughts or memories. Studies even show meditation is effective in controlling anxiety, enhancing the immune system and reducing conditions such as high blood pressure, substance abuse and chronic pain. There are numerous kinds of meditative techniques – concentrative, mindful and transcendental are the three most common. During *concentrative meditation* you focus your attention on a single sound or object or breath to bring about a calm, tranquil mind. During *mindful meditation*, you keep your mind aware, but you do not react to sensations, feelings or images going on around you. During *transcendental meditation*, you put your body at full rest but keep your mind fully alert, bringing about a deep state of relaxation.

Benefits of Better Breathing

Breathing is not only an important part of the meditative process, but used independently, it can be another effective self-help technique. Shallow or poor breathing can contribute to many health disorders as well. Even though breathing is an automatic

response, there are times when mentally adjusting the way we breathe can benefit our health and sense of well-being. For example, learning to breathe deeply from your abdomen rather than your chest will increase your oxygen intake. Shallow breathing inhibits the release of carbon dioxide from your body, creating an imbalance that can contribute to poor health. By practicing proper breathing technique, you can increase lung capacity and energy levels, speed the healing process of many disorders and relieve anxiety, asthma symptoms, insomnia and stress.



Mind over Matter...

Think there is no time to stop and meditate? Meditation actually makes your mind calmer and more focused. A simple 10 or 15 minutes of meditation can help you overcome stress and find some inner peace and balance.