Goal:

Relaxation is the key to self-care. It helps you feel better in mind and in body.

If you practice this skill, your mood will improve, and you’ll feel less anxious. Your feelings will “breathe” with you.

“Soft belly breathing” is a form of concentrative meditation.

Instructions:

Start with the longer version when you are first practicing this mind-body skill. When you get the hang of it, you might find that the shorter version will be enough to help you relax.

Find a quiet place. Either sit up or lay down for this activity. You may play the music listed for this activity, or any other soothing music or nature sounds that you choose.

Soft Belly Breathing (Longer Version)

1. Take a deep breath in. When you are ready, close your eyes, or look at the floor with a “soft” gaze.

2. Breathe in through your nose, and softly out through your mouth. It’s a relaxing way to breathe. A deep breath in through your nose. A soft breath out through your mouth.

3. Let your belly become soft...relaxed. When the belly softens, more air gets into your lungs. Feel the air refresh all the parts of your body...working to relax you.

4. When the belly becomes soft, it turns on your vagus nerve, the longest nerve in your body. It’s often called the “wandering nerve” because it travels from your belly, through the chest, all the way to your brain. It quiets the body...slows the heart...lowers your blood pressure...relaxes your muscles. It quiets the part of your mind that makes you frightened or anxious or angry. It helps you get control over your emotional mind with each deep breath in through the nose... and softly out through your mouth. It calms your need to fight, or runaway, or freeze.

5. This vagus nerve also helps the part of your brain that keeps you aware of your feelings and your environment...helping you feel better.

6. One branch of the vagus nerve reaches the part your brain that makes it easier to connect with other people... to bond with them. So, when you continue breathing slowly and deeply, in through your nose and softly out through your mouth, feeling your belly become soft and relaxed, you are relaxing and bringing your body back into balance. Feeling kindness for yourself, for others...
7. As you breathe in through your nose and softly out through your mouth, you relax more and more, feeling it easier to connect with others, to feel close with them, sensing your stress becoming less and less, feeling more and more calm and happier.

8. When your belly is soft, all the muscles around your chest and back also start to relax...maybe you notice that now...Feel how your shoulders begin to drop and relax. Feel how your chest opens with each breath. Feel how your arms rest comfortably by your sides as you breathe in through your nose, and softly breathe out through your mouth.

9. To become more relaxed, you can say “soft” silently as you breathe in through your nose, and “belly” as you breathe out through your mouth. “Soft”...“belly”...“Soft”...“belly”

10. If thoughts come up, just let them float away like clouds, and bring your mind back to “soft...belly”. Continue breathing “soft...belly” for a few minutes, just to enjoy relaxing more.

11. When you feel ready, open your eyes, and gently become aware of the room.

### Soft Belly Breathing (Shorter Version)

Take a deep breath in and close your eyes or gaze softly in front of you. Breathe deeply, in through the nose and softly out through the mouth. Let your belly go soft. You can say to yourself “soft” as you breathe in and “belly” as you breathe out. If thoughts come, just let them float away like clouds, and bring your mind back to “soft...belly”. Keep saying “soft” as you breathe nice and deep in through your nose, and “belly” as you softly breathe out through your mouth. Letting your belly get soft, letting your body relax, letting your shoulders drop and your muscle relax.

Take a deep breath. When you are ready, open your eyes and gently stretch.

### Tips for Daily Practice

Do this activity 2 or 3 times a day for 5 or 10 minutes at a time. You’re welcome to add another minute or two if you want.

Do this if you want to fall asleep easily at bedtime. Do not do this mind-body skill with a full stomach. Otherwise, you will fall asleep.

Use a timer so you don’t worry about how long you have left.

As you practice more, you will find yourself relaxing as soon as you take a few deep breaths and say “soft...belly”.
Goal:

Sometime you just have too much stress in your body. Sometimes you just don’t have enough energy for the day. Shaking and dancing is the mind-body tool that will help you raise that energy, reduce stress, and break up any physical or emotional habits or patterns that “freeze” you in place.

If you practice this skill, you will feel less pain, more confident, and “go with the flow.” Over time, as you move through stress and tiredness, you, too, will learn to “shake it off.”

“Shaking and dancing” is a form of movement meditation.

Instructions:

Find a space clear enough to jump up and down and to swing or wiggle your arms, legs, and hips side to side. Make sure to move breakable things or things with sharp corners out of your way.

If you have any physical issues, just do the activity to the best of your ability. Go slow, or even do the movement while sitting down. You may play the music listed for this exercise, or any high-energy music with beats.

Shaking and Dancing

1. This movement meditation has three parts: first shaking, then stopping and remaining still for a minute or two, and then finally dancing.

2. Start by putting your feet shoulder-width apart. Bend your knees slightly, relax your shoulders and breathe deeply. Then shake your whole body from your feet, through your knees, then your hips and your shoulders, all the way up to your head.

3. If you have physical issues or pain, just shake to the best of your ability. You can shake slowly while standing, or even while sitting down. Listen to your body.

4. Shake for 7 – 9 minutes. When the music stops, stay in place and pay attention to your breathing and how your body feels. Notice if anything comes up.

5. Now choose a song you can dance to. Let the music move you. Don’t follow a particular pattern or dance step. Just let your body move as it wants to.

6. Sometimes it helps to keep your eyes close. Don’t yourself to anyone else. Remember, there is no wrong way to do this. Just have the experience.
Mind-Body Skills Resources
Music, Websites, and Other Tools for Self-Care

Music from Our Mind-Body Skills Session:

1. For “Soft Belly Breathing”, we used the music called “432Hz | Seed of Life | You are a Miracle | Manifest whatever you Desire” by the Meditative Mind YouTube channel. You can use the following link to listen to that music:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gALKr1prHWE
   Alternative music: soothing instrumental music or nature sounds (ocean waves, gentle rain, or rushing rivers and waterfalls).

2. For the “Shaking” portion of the movement meditation, we used the music called “Osho Kundalini Meditation Music” by Sounds Of Dhyana YouTube channel. You can use the following link to listen to that music:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtiV-ddyuI
   Alternative music: Tribal drumbeats, African dance music, Latin American rhythmic drumming, high-energy moving music.

3. For the “Dancing” portion of the movement meditation, we used the song called “Three Little Birds” by Reggae musician Bob Marley. You can use the following link to listen to that song:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaGUr6wzyT8
   Alternative music: Music or songs that you like to dance and groove to.

Websites for Mind-Body Skills:

One of the best resources for learning about mind-body skills is the Center for Mind-Body Medicine located at the link: https://cmbm.org/

On that website you can find videos, discussions and studies about mind-body skills. You can even go for mind-body skills training yourself.

Other Resources:

1. For more on trauma-informed healing:

2. For more on breathwork:

3. For more on meditation:

Stay in Touch:

We’d love to hear how you’re doing with your daily self-care practice and using these mind-body skills in your life.

You can leave us posts on our Facebook page for Integrated Wellness and Health at:

https://www.facebook.com/IWAH-Psychiatry-105025038205443