

Happy hearts are healthy hearts

Advice Line

by Dr. Betty Phillips



*And then my heart with pleasure fills,
and dances with the daffodils.*
—William Wordsworth

Take a moment to let those words sink into your heart and let your mind dance with the joy and happiness of this beautiful vision. Did you know that the stress monster hates love, peace and joy? Right now people are thinking about whether they want to inoculate themselves against the H1N1 virus. Wouldn't you like to inoculate yourself against tension, anger, frustration and other modern day problems? This month I'm writing about techniques for heart coherence and loving kindness meditation which can bring beauty and peace into your life and, guess what, also raise your immunity to disease!

In case you may be "macho" and think that these techniques are "wimpy," keep reading. These techniques are powerful and strong! Recent research has shown that heart coherence has wide ranging benefits. The heart's beat-to-beat rhythmic patterns are called heart rate variability and are quite sensitive to changing emotional states. A coherent heart rhythm pattern indicates a state of balance and synchronization between both parts of your autonomic nervous system. You've learned how over excitation of the sympathetic nervous system results in physical, mental and emotional stress including the fight or flight syndrome, while the parasympathetic nervous system controls the relaxation response. Positive emotions



and coherent heart rhythms cause both the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems to operate in a harmonious pattern we call emotional coherence. The heart coherence pattern shows on a monitor as smooth sine waves, while negative emotions cause disordered and chaotic rhythms displayed on a computer screen as rough and jagged patterns. If you want additional scientific information you can consult research from the Institute of HeartMath (www.heartmath.org.)

So how can we use this technique called heart coherence to protect ourselves against stress when it's all around us? It's best to spend a little time practicing this when you're not stressed. The basic technique is called Choosing the Heart. Slow down, shift your attention to the area of your heart and breathe deeply. Call to mind someone or something you truly love and appreciate and then radiate the positive vision and caring feelings into the heart area. Try to stay in your heart to sustain these positive feelings and catch your mind from wandering. Once you learn to identify heart coherence, you can then call upon this feeling to restore emotional balance and clear thinking. If you're having

Need advice?

Send Dr. Betty Phillips questions about individual, relationship, marriage or family issues to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

difficulty with this practice, the Institute sells handheld and computer-based programs to assist you in learning this technique. I practice with the emWave myself and it sends delightful chimes my way when I attain a state of coherence. Books available on the HeartMath website describe adaptations of this technique for negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, anger and emotional chaos as well as health issues such as sleep, hypertension and emotional eating. The Institute also sponsors a free Global Coherence Initiative (www.glcoherence.org) to send compassion to various world sites.

I recommend that you use heart coherence to augment the loving kindness meditation. I have found this meditation important and powerful enough to recommend it to my clients and to all my readers and, of course, I use it daily. Please go to the Reading Room section of my website, (www.BettyPhillipsPsychology.com) for an article containing my recommendations and suggestions for this meditation. Very briefly, the meditation sends wishes of loving kindness to yourself, to loved ones, to a neutral person, a difficult person and finally to the entire world. The wishes are conveyed with the word "may" and can be chosen as needed, for example, "May ___ be safe... peaceful... healthy... happy."

You can use your heart coherence and loving kindness skills to handle daily stress. For example, you're stuck in traffic and feeling the beginnings of road rage. You can take a quick moment to breathe these interconnected wishes into your heart: "May I be peaceful and calm and happy; May everyone in this traffic be peaceful and calm and happy." A few minutes and your impatience and stress will begin melting away.

I do hope you will invest some time in reading this information and developing these new skills. Once you start your time investment can be as short as 5 or 10 minutes a day and your results will be transformative! You won't even need daffodils to dance in your heart!

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