

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Do the (Heart) Math

Most of us have regular routines to be ready for our important work each day. We recharge our phones and lay out our clothes. We pack a lunch in the morning and make or buy our coffee. Yet we often fail to recharge and prepare ourselves emotionally, physically, and spiritually each day. Because we don't do this, over time we can become depleted, worn down, and emptied.

Like our phones, we expend energy each day and need daily recharging. Expending energy without a balancing input of adequate rest and recovery practices will soon or later lead to fatigue, errors, and health impacts. Our effectiveness will wane, and we may come to the point of burnout.

Difficult emotions – fear, frustration, impatience, grief, and anger – have a toxic impact. They activate the release of stress chemicals into the body, which can build up in the person. This can lead to loss of muscle mass, the death of brain cells, and impaired memory. It can accelerate aging and diminish performance.

Yet things do not need to go this way. It is possible to trade in difficult emotions for positive emotions and attitudes in your daily experiences. One can experience caring, courage, acceptance, appreciation, and gratitude. These attitudes support regeneration and helps to offset energy drains. This can increase longevity, greater resilience to adversity, improved memory and cognition. Many people experience improved problem-solving capacity, performance, and achievement.

These emotional, cognitive, and physical benefits begin with a keener self-awareness regarding the energy drains in one's life. This includes taking regular inventories of one's emotional state, naming the negative states and "stopping the train."

Then do the math – practicing heart-focused breathing to slow the emotional energy drain and stop the production of stress chemicals. Doing this controlled breathing promoted great self-regulation, and a more coherent state that is calmer and more composed yet more alert. How does it work?

Focus on your heart area in your body. Your breath is going in and out. Begin to breathe slower and deeper. Try breathing by the numbers – inhale slowly and deeply for 5 seconds, and then exhale slowly for 5 seconds. If 5 seconds is too slow for you, cut that to 3 or 4 seconds. Do this breathing until you are relaxed, calm, focused, and composed. Return your thinking to caring for yourself and others, acceptance, courageous thinking, appreciation for others, and gratitude for all your many gifts.

You can do this heart breathing anywhere at any time. You do not need to step out outside. Simply put it into practice right now, right where you are, whenever you feel stressed, or you sense the energy draining. Make time three or four times on your shift to practice it. The drive home and inside your house works, too. Give it a two-week trial run to build the habit. Check out the video presentation at WellnessMN.org.