THE POWER OF THE BREATH: THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

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Medical Disclaimer

These resources are not meant as endorsements or recommendations by HSS or its faculty, or by SAA. For specific guidance, seek the advice of your personal medical care provider.
Learning Objectives

- Understand the meaning of “mindful breathing”
- Learn about the spaciousness and de-stressing benefits mindful breathing can bring to spondyloarthritis symptoms
- Understand the connection between stress, inflammation and discomfort or pain
- Learn breathing and gentle movement techniques
- Practice deep relaxation together
• Be kind to yourself. You deserve it living with the challenges of spondyloarthritis!

• Accept yourself exactly where you are at this moment with compassion.
• Breath is always available to us – at the airport, doctor’s office, waiting for the bus, on hold with the insurance company.

• Bring your focus to that breath.
What is “mindful breathing?”

- Say to yourself “I am breathing in. I am breathing out.”

- The mind will naturally wander. Kindly notice where it went and ask it to return to focusing on your breath – “I’m breathing in. I’m breathing out.”

- Be as present in this moment as possible – in your clothes, in your chair, with your body & mind – “mindful”
Three-Part Breath – The Basic Breath

- Before we begin, notice your level of comfort/discomfort. Meet yourself honestly where you are in the moment.

- Support yourself in a comfortable, though alert, position (seated, reclining, semi-reclining – even standing).

- Part 1 -- Gently expand the belly as you begin to inhale.

- Part 2 -- Gently expand the lower ribs (feel them with your hands to be sure they move) as you continue.

- Part 3 -- Gently expand the upper chest, lengthening, opening.
A POWERFUL SIGNAL TO THE BRAIN

- To breathe out, first bring in the upper ribs.
- Then bring in the lower ribs (find those muscles!)
- Finally, bring the belly toward the spine like a sit-up.
- Making the breath out longer than the breath in calms the nervous system.
Focus on a thought or intention – whatever you may need or want (strength, courage, compassion, wishing comfort for yourself or another person or group).

Hold the thought in your mind and imagine that intention in your heart too, while you breathe in.

Let your thought or intention spread out like a wave or a breeze from your heart as you breathe out.
BENEFITS OF MINDFUL BREATH

- Enhances movement, inside and out. Organs and connective tissue, bones and ligaments – everything moves
- Movement of the ribs is tracked by the brain
- Deeper movement = stronger signal to de-stress
- Length of the exhalation is also tracked by the brain
- Longer exhalation = stronger signal to de-stress
Less Stress Can Mean Less Pain

- Stress – including chronic stress -- can contribute to the inflammation, worry, pain & the challenges of Spondyloarthritis

- DE-STRESS with mindful breath and movement and, potentially, reduce inflammation, pain, discomfort – easing the symptoms in the organs, joints, feet ...
ADD SOME MOVEMENT – BREATH OF COMFORT

- Seated, put your hands on your knees.
- Slide the hands back toward your hips as you breathe in your intention – comfort or strength or joy ...
- Draw the shoulders and elbows back and lift your heart.
- Breathe out negativity as you slide the hands back to your knees.
- Gently fold forward and lower your chin.
- Repeat a few times.
- This helps stretch the back body and gives a nice massage to the abdominal organs. Great for when you have to sit a lot, like at work.
MEDITATE
A LITTLE HELP -- BOX BREATH

- To help make mindful breath more accessible – and join it with a meditation practice, try Box Breath (especially when you need some peace and it’s hard to come by).

- First, relax and make yourself as comfortable as possible, with compassion.

- As you breathe in, use your hand to trace the side of a box, bottom to top (or imagine tracing the box).

- Hold your breath gently as your hand traces the top of the box.

- Breathe out as you trace the other side of the box, top to bottom.

- Hold your breath gently as you complete tracing the box, crossing the hand back across to your starting point.

- Meditation – even after one session – can help us feel less reactive, calmer, more compassionate. You’ll probably notice the effect.
EVERYDAY TWISTS

To reduce stiffness that can come with spondyloarthritis, add breath to a routine twist.

Need to reach across the body to get your coffee, turn on a lamp? Make it a beneficial, breath-based MOMENT OF YOGA.

Or, take a few moments to do a mindful twist. ASK YOUR DOCTOR OR PHYSICAL THERAPIST HOW MUCH TWISTING IS SAFE FOR YOU

Begin your twist with a comfortable seated position.

With your lower torso, as long as it is safe for you, twist gently to one side with a breath in, pausing for a moment now and then to breathe out and possibly deepen the twist from the inside out.

With a breath in, add the lower ribs, then upper chest and head with mindful breaths – no strain!!

Mindfully breathe in and out a few times, noticing your “edges,” and untwisting from them to open them up with breath or gentle movement.

Come slowly back to center and do the other side.
The Relaxation Response opens the door to a deep sense of well-being
Starting from your toes, squeeze and release every part of your body – calves, thighs, fists, arms, buttocks, face.

Expand your belly with a breath in. Hold it in for a moment and sigh as you breathe out.

Repeat with your chest.

Come to calm. Imagine a healing wave or breeze or color and begin to bring that healing energy to your toes. Continue on up, bringing relaxation to every part of your body – skin, joints, muscles, organs. (Continued on next page)
Deep Relaxation, continued

- Mentally take a step back and see the body at rest, all cells on all layers of the body and mind at ease.

- Bring the focus to the breath and observe it, without changing it, for a minute.

- Bring the focus to the mind and watch everything come and go like clouds for a minute.

- Allow the space between the thoughts, the clouds, to broaden and deepen. Gently inhabit that space.

- Rest deeply, in your own sense of wholeness and deepest source of healing for several minutes or longer.

- Bring yourself out with gentle movement, deepening breath. Take a few moments to bring this peace back to the room and the rest of your day or night.
Benefits of Mind-Body Practices

- Because both movement and good alignment are so key, mindful breathing and mindful movement practices can be ideal supports for those living with the challenges of spondyloarthritis.
- Because the practices usually feel good and create a sense of ease and pleasure, they can fairly easily become a part of everyday routines, potentially helping to minimize pain, and help with the emotional impact of chronic illness.
- Because they can be done seated or reclining, benefits come without aggravating tender feet.
- Yoga in the moment – always there for you. It’s free!!
Your breath is always there.

Have compassion for yourself! Make the most of that companion.

Bring your attention to your breath.

Choose an intention – gratitude, courage, compassion. Choose whatever you or any friend or loved one or the world needs to accompany that breath into your heart.

Use the three-part breath to make it as powerful as possible, bringing gentle movement and spaciousness to joints, muscles, organs and making that signal to the brain crystal clear.
RESTORATIVE YOGA –
LAY YOUR BURDENS DOWN

Supported Forward Bend
Open and Lengthen the Back ... Relax the Front
RESOURCES

- My deep relaxation is on the Hospital for Special Surgery’s patient education website. With the following link, navigate to the guided meditation link in the right-hand column. [https://www.hss.edu/health-video-library.asp](https://www.hss.edu/health-video-library.asp). The HSS RA clinic also offers monthly mind-body sessions for qualifying patients.

- Therapeutic, gentle and restorative yoga or Yoga for Arthritis classes are recommended – as long as the teacher is experienced. Yoga therapy with certified Yoga Therapists and/or experienced teachers such as those certified as Yoga for Arthritis teachers, can safely tailor the practices to those living with spondyloarthritis and other rheumatic conditions.

- Guided mind-body breathing and pain practices are available online through organizations like the Arthritis Foundation.
Yoga Therapy – New Form of Support

- “Yoga Therapy ... can greatly benefit people with spondyloarthritis under the instruction of a knowledgeable instructor who can tailor the program to the individual.”

- ........... From the SAA website, under “About Spondylitis > Treatment Information > Complementary Treatments”

- New Feature -- International Association of Yoga Therapists ... yogatherapy.health
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