

This is why we should all start breathing

Image credit: Instagram/gisele

10th May 2017

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WELLBEING

Inhale and exhale.

‘You should really meditate’. It’s a phrase you’ve probably heard a handful of times from *that* friend who seems to exude endless zen by taking 20 minutes out of their daily routine to calm their mind, centre their body, and simply breathe. And, who loves to share just how great it is. Well, as it turns out, they’re not wrong.



In fact, breathing is having a moment. There are apps to help you do it correctly (btw, there’s a right and wrong way), and the Apple Watch Series 2 even houses the Breathe app which pings you a notification to remind you to stop and take a moment out of your busy lives to, well, breathe.

Vogue checked in with, Dr John Denninger, director of clinical research from the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, to learn just how good the simple act of breathing is.

How does breathing lower stress levels?

“The relaxation response is the state that comes about when you use techniques like breathing, meditation, yoga etc. The state is one of let’s say, physiological relaxation. In that what happens is, you have a reaction that is potentially the opposite of what happens to you in the stress response. So the stress response everyone’s familiar with, that’s what happens to you when you get a nasty email from your boss and your heart starts to pound, that’s the stress response. That’s something that in today’s unfortunately ultra-stressful world, that we all encounter more of and more cohesively than our ancestors did in the old days. So the way that the relaxation response counters that is by essentially causing a physiological change to the opposite of what you see in a stress response.”

Is there a right and wrong way to breath?

“The most important thing is to actually be taking the time to focus on something, and the breath is a focus point and is something that has been used for over thousands of years, it’s something that is always with you. You know, you don’t need any special equipment to focus on the breath, and we’ve been teaching our programs for literally decades to take these very short breaks over the course of one’s day. To focus on the breath, or mantra, or counting, as a way of bringing focus, mindfulness and awareness into your life.”

Do you think we’re all hungry for ways to counteract the stresses of everyday life?

“I think we are, clearly not everyone’s looking for that, they may be looking out for it but they may not know it. I think people are feeling really, really stressed. I suspect it’s not helped by the fact that even when I was a kid you could get away from things more easily. Now you know we have smartphones or the likes and Wi-Fi or cell networks, it is difficult to get away from the stresses that are in our lives. There is something about our lives that feels more hectic and more stressful and I suspect a little bit of that is this pervasiveness. It’s not even necessarily stresses about big things right? I mean you know, people stress about someone posting to their Facebook page or not getting enough likes on their Instagram post.”

What are your thoughts on meditation apps?

“What I really like about the Breathe app and about any kind of technique that is accessible to people, is that they do give people who might not otherwise give meditation a try, a sense of how powerful those techniques can be.”

On the web:

<http://www.vogue.com.au/beauty/wellbeing/this+is+why+we+should+all+start+breathing,42786>