

Five stress-breakers

Feeling stressed? Follow these five strategies from yoga master Yogi Ashokananda to help you survive the daily grind.

■ To wake a tired brain in the morning, fill your mouth with cold water, lean over a sink and splash your face, keeping the water in your mouth. Try to keep your eyes open while you inhale through your nose. Repeat five times.

■ Take regular breaks from sitting at your desk by stretching. But don't make the mistake of twisting your torso, which can cause a slipped disc. Stand up and stretch side to side, then hang forward so the head is below the waist.

■ Sit down and close your eyes for two minutes, focusing solely on breathing while inhaling and exhaling through the nose.

■ When exercising, keep the mouth shut and breathe only through your nose. This will transform your workout and how you feel during exercise. If you get hot, you can exhale through the mouth to cool down the system.

■ Meditation newbie? Start by simply lying down on your back on a hard surface and breathing from the belly. Try inhaling for 10 seconds, pausing for 10 seconds, exhaling for 10 seconds. Repeat for 20 minutes a day to fully feel the benefits.

— Thandi Fletcher

Taking time to breathe can help the brain

IT'S BASIC: 'The thread that keeps everything together,' meditation master here for conference says



Yogi Ashokananda relaxes on Tuesday outside the Vancouver Convention Centre, where he is one of the featured speakers at the first BrainSolutions conference. JASON PAYNE/PNG

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THE PROVINCE

If you just inhaled and exhaled in the time it took to read this sentence, you're probably doing it wrong.

Breathing may seem like second nature, but according to yoga and meditation master Yogi Ashokananda, most people don't know how to breathe properly. That opens them up to a host of health problems in both the body and the brain, he said.

"Breath is the thread that keeps everything together," he said. "If people really lived a proper life, I don't think they would need to do Botox."

Ashokananda is one of eight brain health experts speaking at the first BrainSolutions conference taking place Aug. 24 and 25 at the Vancouver Convention Centre. The event will see experts from a variety of fields such as science, medicine and nutrition giving a series of talks on brain health and its role in boosting happiness, improving cognition and relationships.

Although the brain is involved in everything we do in our daily lives, people rarely pause to think about the complex organ, said Neil Sharma, former vice-president of Samsung, who will be the master of ceremonies for the conference.

"The brain consumes 70 per cent of all the calories going into the body and yet we don't quite give the brain its due," Sharma said.

On a bustling Tuesday morning in downtown Vancouver, Ashokananda exuded a calming energy, sipping on a herbal tea as he observed the frenetic energy of people in power suits hurrying to their offices in the city's business district.

It's this stress-filled society, in which people have "lost touch with themselves," that pushes Ashokananda to help people learn how to breathe properly to reduce depression, anxiety and stress, and rejuvenate the brain and nervous system.

Breath forms the foundation of all that, he said. To practise proper breathing, Ashokananda said people should try inhaling and exhaling through the nose. The length of the inhalation should be the same as the length of the exhalation, he said.

"When you get the breath right, the state of meditation automatically comes," he said.

For more information about the BrainSolutions conference and how to get tickets, visit www.brainsolutions.ca

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