

## Body-Mindfulness

By Marjorie L. Rand Ph.D.

If I could offer you a cure for your depression and anxiety that did not cost any money, required no special clothing nor equipment and is something you are already doing, would you want to know what it is? Or would you rather take expensive pills which have multiple side effects. There is even a hidden extra benefit which comes along with the secret cure, of which I will inform you later.

Before I tell you the secret, I also need to give you a few facts. There are various forms of depression from dysthymia (mild) to clinical (severe) with many variations in between these extremes. With extreme cases medication in combination with psychotherapy, yoga, meditation and exercise is the most effective treatment. But most people along the mild to moderate portion of the scale who are functioning, living a productive life, but who feel numb or just do not feel fully alive are not in need of medication. Maybe they are OK at work, because it provides structure, a place to go, something to do everyday. But on weekends they may isolate and hang around the house watching TV or sleeping all day, never even getting dressed all weekend. They do not shop or cook for themselves, so they tend to eat fast food or junk food, mindlessly. Does this apply, even a little bit, to you?

So part of the secret cure that most people are not aware of is that they can control their own nervous system. Many of us spend our lives trying to control other people and our environment (which is not possible), instead of trying to modulate or regulate our own states of arousal or moods. We have it completely backwards. The only thing we can control is ourselves. But since our nervous systems and emotions reside in our bodies, (Pert, et.al), we cannot control or regulate our emotions from our minds.

Are you getting any closer to guessing the cure? What do meditation, Yoga and exercise have in common? You may guess breathing and you would be correct. Let me explain how the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) works and how you can use breathing to modulate and change it. The ANS is often thought of as “automatic” because it controls functions which are usually unconscious, such as heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, circulation to name just a few. However, many of these autonomic or unconscious functions can come into conscious control through one system. By now, I think you have guessed it. Breathing is the one function in our bodymind that can be done unconsciously or consciously. Actually breathing is the most basic support system of living. You can live long periods of time without food, and shorter periods of time without water, but only minutes without breathing.

Here are 4 basic ingredients of the secret cure for depression:

- Breathing
- Containment
- Grounding
- Presence
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Breathing

When we are hyper-aroused (sympathetic or fight or flight) we are stuck in a response which floods us with stress hormones. We can regulate our ANS down to parasympathetic (relaxation). How? Through breathing!

First, we want to relax and expand the body by parasympathetic breathing, and creating space for energy to flow. We focus the breath down in the lower abdomen (navel center) and focus on a long sighing exhale (exhaling more than we inhale).

Once the body is expanded (which I will explain in containment) we can move on to sympathetic breathing techniques. In states of hypo arousal (depression), there are different breathing techniques for heightening arousal or aliveness and energy. Sympathetic breathing techniques involve breathing into the upper chest all the way up to the upper ribs and collar bones. In this type of breathing the inhale is emphasized-almost like a runner who is panting and calling up energy to the muscles.

Optimally, we want balanced breathing equally distributed between chest and belly, but that would require a moving, flexible diaphragm muscle.

### Containment

If you pour liquid into a rigid container (a glass vase, for example), there is a limit to how much liquid the container can hold before it spills over (discharges) or breaks (fragments). Your body is the container for your life energy which is generated by breathing. Your body needs to expand like a balloon which stretches and holds more air with each breath. On the exhale, tension is released from the muscles. Something like letting the air out of the balloon. So the inhale is “opening up” and the exhale is “letting go”. With each and every breath you are expanding your container and building more energy, which is the antithesis of depression. In depression, the body is closed down, the exhale is retained and there is little energy. So the secret cure for depression really is breathing!

### Grounding

What is grounding? It means being (living) inside your body and not only in your head. So grounding has something to do with the feet. If you are standing your feet are on the ground. Can you imagine putting your brain in the soles of your feet? How different might your reality seem? If you are sitting, then your sitting bones as well as your feet are in contact with the ground. And if you are lying down, you are most grounded of all, as your whole body is being supported by the floor or bed. It is extremely important to be grounded if you intend to use your breath to lift you out of your depression.

### Presence

Remember in elementary school, when the teacher would call roll and you would answer “present” if you were not absent? How many of us are really “absent” in our lives, living in a world we have created through our belief systems, instead of in the here and now present moment. Depression is primarily living in the past, and getting present in the moment usually results in feeling OK (right here, right now). So the mindfulness

techniques help us to keep watching ourselves slide into the past and snatch ourselves back up to the present (where we are OK).

So now you have the ingredients for the secret cure to depression. If you are on medication for depression prescribed by a physician or psychiatrist, do not stop taking your meds unless you consult with that prescribing physician. It is perfectly safe to do the breathing techniques along with your meds.

You can see examples of my breathing techniques on You Tube (under my name) or on my website [www.drdrandbodymindtherapy.com](http://www.drdrandbodymindtherapy.com) under Yoga Therapy.