

CONVICT CHRONICLES: TIP #21

BREATHE EASY

By Leo Cardez

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There is a medical term called heart rate variability or HRV which stands for the time between heartbeats. There's significant research demonstrating a co-relation between better HRV (longer spaces between heartbeats) and improved mood, enhanced focus, better sleep, boosted energy, and more resilience overall. Anyone would benefit from better HRV and fortunately anyone can...with a little practice.

Here's the secret habit to a better HRV:

Take two minutes (the average commercial break in your favorite show) and start by inhaling through your nose for four seconds -- mentally count while focusing on the sensation of the air flowing in through your nostrils. Now, without pausing, exhale for six seconds through your pursed lips -- as if you are blowing on hot food. Again, count mentally as you focus on feeling the air through your mouth.

You may notice an immediate feeling of both relaxation and alertness. Work your way up to twenty minutes a day, twice a day. I have been adding one minute a week and am up to ten minutes twice a day. The biggest and most immediate result I have noticed is my ability to fall asleep faster, sleep deeper, and wake up more refreshed. I have always had sleep issues, especially since my incarceration -- this is the first thing that's actually worked.

Beyond the aforementioned benefits, there's additional perks to a stronger, lower baseline heartbeat. For example, for work-out junkies they'll note less effort exerted to achieve the same results. Also, there's a second wind effect, which means they'll be able to go longer and stronger.



Also, as the breathing exercises push more blood to our muscles -- our biggest muscle benefits the most. More blood flow to the brain can mean greater clarity, concentration, and focus. The reduced stress will also help us make better, more rational decisions. Some researchers are studying the seeming reduction of degenerative cognition as we age in some study participants.

So there you have it, this brain hack is a no-brainer, but you have to stick to the science. The magic number is forty minutes a day of conscious breathing. Any less and we miss out on the full array of benefits, we need the full forty to completely rewire our brain. Twenty minutes twice a day, ten minutes four times a day, or however you can get to forty; either way it's the best return on investment we can ask for in prison.

Sources: Leah Lagos, author, Heart Breath Mind and clinical sports psychologist.

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