

## Mental Health Monday: Breathing Exercises and Positive Affirmations

Bill Pollock

This is Show Me Today, the Voice of Missouri. I'm Bill Pollock, and it's our Mental Health Monday segments. And joining us once again, Rachel Jones, a Licensed Professional Counselor and the manager of Trauma Informed Treatment at the Department of Mental Health. Welcome back, Rachel. Great to have you again.

Rachel Jones

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. So the let's have some fun.

Bill Pollock

Yeah, well, somebody's going to have fun. I don't know about this, but I'm a little anxious about this, but I volunteered to help out. We had you on a while back. We talked about HappierU. And then, you said you're going to help me with some breathing and the self-affirmation exercises.

Now, as we kind of set this up and walk through these things. What are we trying to accomplish for our listeners?

Rachel Jones

Sure. Anyone can do it. You can do it throughout your day and there's some benefits to it.

Bill Pollock

You would mostly do these in private?

Rachel Jones

You could do them in private or in team settings, at work or with your family. There's a lot of ways you could do them.

Bill Pollock

Yeah. All right. So what are the what are the benefits of, of breathing and self-affirmation?

Rachel Jones

Well, let's start with breathing. Of course, breathing is an important part of what we do every day, right, to stay alive. But a lot of times, people breathing is actually very shallow. And they're not getting oxygen to the brain the way that our brain really needs it. And that influences how our mind and body works all day, every day. Now, another thing that surprises people to learn is that when you're feeling stressed out, your breathing changes too. So some people hold their breath for periods of time because they're stressed out. They're trying to figure something out, they're worried, they're

irritable. And so what they're doing is they're tensing up and they're actually holding their breath. So they're limiting oxygen to the brain completely. And it's not just the brain that benefits from oxygen. It helps with circulation, and it helps with all of the other vital organs that we've got in our body that we need to be able to work so that we're healthy and strong.

So learning how to breathe deeply is a skill that people have to practice. A lot of times people think about breathing deeply, that it's this deep, 30-minute silent meditation practice. It doesn't have to be that, it can be five minutes or less of a breathing activity that starts to change the way your brain and body function because your muscles are relaxing, you're focusing on the here and now. You're not worried about what has happened or what might happen. You're focusing just on this moment and your own body. So it's an awkward feeling for a lot of people because they don't know how to do it. But once you get the hang of it, you can notice the benefits, and then you can just practice it a little bit at a time throughout your day.

Bill Pollock

Alright, so you make a conscious effort to do it? Does it become a point where if you do it enough that it becomes second nature so when you are in stress, your body just kicks in to this breathing?

Rachel Jones

The more that you're practicing something and it becomes habitual, the brain makes that connection. Ooh, when this happens, I'm going to start breathing deeply because that actually regulates my nervous system. It calms me down. I manage something better.

Bill Pollock

All right. Well, we won't do a five minute exercise just because of our of our time constraint because it is radio. Kind of draw a visualization, Rachel, of what I need to do to get prepared. Do I need to sit a certain way? Laid down, I mean, I can try to lay down and hold the microphone, but what?

Rachel Jones

People whatever the comfortable position is, you know, some people listening are driving, so you're obviously behind the wheel. But if you can kind of try to relax your body a bit. For you, you can sit, you can stand, you can lay. But the real important part is just get yourself into a comfortable position, okay?

Alright, The next thing you want to do is try to remove as many distractions. Because what we're going to do is focus on your breaths. You're going to turn inward and focus on you right now. So breathe in through your nose and just feel the air coming through your nostrils. And then breathe out through your mouth and notice the air passing out.

Bill Pollock

Now, do I have to be loud or can I do this silently?

Rachel Jones

How about you do it silent since you're new at it and I'll be loud since I do it a lot. That sound okay?

Bill Pollock

That sounds good. All right, let me get my inner focus again.

Rachel Jones

Everybody's gonna breathe in through your nose. And out through your mouth. In. And out.

Bill Pollock

Should you focus on parts of your body relaxing too?

Rachel Jones

Yes, absolutely. I'm glad you mentioned shoulders, because what happens is our shoulders creep up toward our ears. The more stressed out we are. And we don't realize it, but we hold that pose throughout the day. And then, of course, that causes your neck and shoulder tension and pain because your muscles are hardened and they're holding this stressed position for a long time.

When you begin to breathe, you'll notice that gradual relaxation of a lot of different parts of your body. So, you'll notice that chest rising and falling. You'll notice the belly expanding and then getting small again. You'll definitely notice the shoulders dropping and relaxing. You should even notice tension in your jaw and your mouth starts to release. Your tongue starts to drop from the roof of your mouth to just relaxing. So there's a lot of muscles that just start to relax. Because as you're breathing and giving your body what it needs, you can get that tension out.

Bill Pollock

Rachel Jones, a Licensed Professional Counselor and the manager of Trauma Informed Treatment at the Department of Mental Health, joining us here on our mental Health Monday segment.

So, you said you don't have to do it 30 minutes, but what should you feel like, though, when you're like, okay, you know what I'm done. I'm in a good place. I'm relaxed. What should that feel like?

Rachel Jones

Yeah, well, it should feel like that. Okay, I did that. I'm relaxed. I notice my shoulders are lower. I'm more focused. I am more even keeled.

Bill Pollock

All right, so let's get into the next exercise. I thought that one was easy. This one I think is going to be difficult. The self-affirmation.

Rachel Jones

Now why do you think it's going to be difficult?

Bill Pollock

Well, because I think you're going to make me talk about myself and say great things about myself.

Rachel Jones

Nah

Bill Pollock

No? Okay. All right.

Rachel Jones

Well, yeah, you are going to have to say great things about yourself.

Bill Pollock

All right. So, now, you lied to me, Rachel! You set me up. Well, that's hard for people to do, though, because, you know, a lot of times, I mean, we beat ourselves up, you know, either verbally or internally. So to change that is very difficult, I imagine.

Rachel Jones

Right. We do spend a lot of time talking to ourselves throughout the day, but our thoughts are often critical, judgmental. We focus on the things that we're not, instead of focusing on the things that we are, so positive affirmations or just the positive things you say to yourself about yourself and you're doing it in an intentional way. So, you have this internal thought script where right where rewriting the script or trying to erase some of those negative thoughts and stop them when they happen and replace them with something more positive.

Clip from Saturday Night Live with Michael Jordan

I don't have to be a great basketball player. I don't have to be a great basketball. I don't have to dribble the ball fast or throw the ball into the basket. I don't have to dribble the ball fast or throw the ball in the basket.

Rachel Jones

And that's what we're going to do together. Bill, are you ready to do it?

Bill Pollock

I'm ready now. I played the clip from Saturday Night Live with Michael Jordan. Do I have to be staring at myself in the mirror? You know, do people have to do that kind of again, give our listeners an idea of what they should be doing, what their surroundings should be looking like, because I want the listeners to do this, too. I want them to say nice things about themselves to what we're doing this.

Rachel Jones

So yes, I hope they do as well. Ideally, yes, you are looking at yourself and saying it out loud. That's going to be the most positive benefit you get from it, because you're seeing yourself and you're hearing yourself say it. But if you're not there yet or you're not right now in a place where you can be looking at yourself in the mirror, just saying these things to yourself about yourself is a good way to move forward. You don't even really have to believe all of them, by the way. You're just practicing saying positive things to yourself about yourself.

Bill Pollock

Okay, well, listen. And a lot of people, you take selfies, so just hold up your phone and that'd be a great way. Then you could put it on Instagram and TikTok too. There you go.

All right, so what? So what am I what am I going to say? What will give me some tips on what I should say about myself or what the listeners should say?

Rachel Jones

How about I guide you? I have seven statements that I'm just going to say these positive affirmations, and I want you and your listeners to just say it back. If you want to say it out loud, Bill, you can. If you want to say it silently to yourself, you can do that too. But how about I guide you through and give you an idea of what they could sound like? And then over time, you build your own positive affirmations that really fit well for you. Okay, how's that sound?

Bill Pollock

That sounds good.

Rachel Jones

All right. I'm going to say them: I am enough. I deserve happiness. I am worthy. I will do my best today. I care about and love myself. I get wiser and stronger each day. I am resilient. How many of them did you believe about yourself, Bill?

Bill Pollock

You know, half of them? Yeah. Probably half. Yeah. The breathing. Self-affirmation. Would you do it as often as you need, or is there, you know, a set number that people should try to focus on?

## Rachel Jones

I always recommend starting your day with positive affirmations. When you open your eyes and look up into the ceiling while you're still in bed, take time to say positive things to yourself. That starts your day off right, and it's so much easier to deal with whatever's going to come.

It is really helpful to write them down somewhere. So you know, with the devices you can take screenshots of stuff so that you can always refer back to them. You can put them in your notes app on your devices. You can write them with a dry erase marker on your bathroom mirror so that every morning when you're getting ready, they're right there for you to read.

There's a lot of ways that you can just put them front and center so that you can remind yourself to say these positive things about yourself.

## Bill Pollock

That's great. Rachel Jones, thank you. That was a fun segment here for Mental Health Monday.

## Jingle

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