

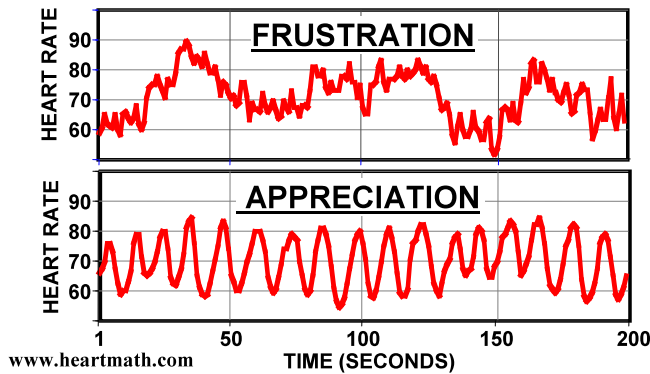
HEARTMATH BASED PRACTICES

Part I – Background

The handout briefly introduce some practices, for more information and books see www.heartmath.com.

Emotions are Reflected in Heart Rhythm Patterns

Am J Cardiol. 1995;76(14):1089-1093.

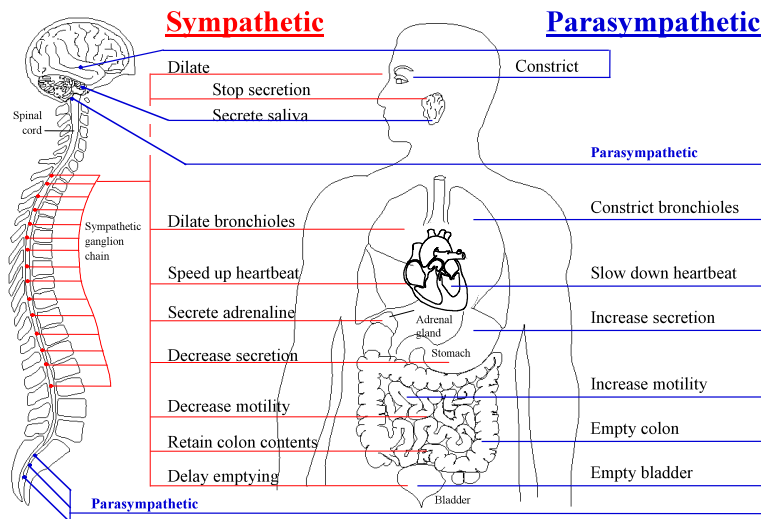


Psychophysiological coherence - Effects?

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Practicing this meditation exercise will improve your health, mood and immune system.

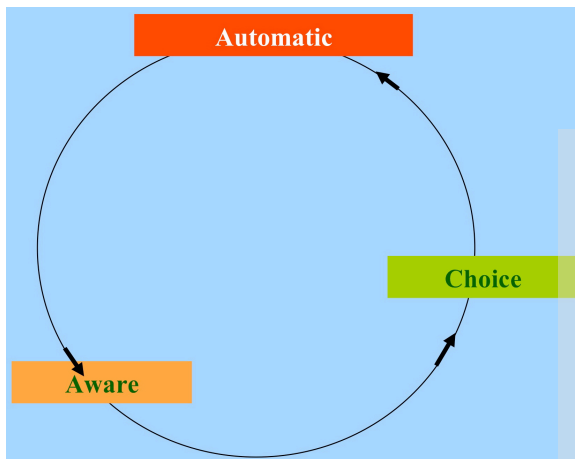
It will help you learn to move your heart rhythm from the erratic pattern in the top graph to the harmony (coherence) in the bottom graph. This is helped by learning to create an 'emotional shift'.



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This change affects the signals being sent through the body, for example, through the 'autonomic' nervous system. Other systems like your brain wave, gut, lung and muscle tone follow this new heart wave pattern: the heart offers a drum beat that the other systems follow (synchronisation). It will also change the signals sent to the immune system.



Also embedded in this exercise is practice at training the wandering mind, and increasing mindful awareness – a very rich field in itself to explore – this is introduced in The WEL course.

HEARTMATH BASED PRACTICES

Part I – learning the main skills: Prepare yourself, bringing the most helpful attitude you can manage at this time. Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and bring yourself to the practice. Perhaps begin with scanning/tuning in to awareness of around you, how you are in feelings and thoughts, then your body – then practice shifting attention to specific areas – such as a foot, then a hand – before moving attention to the centre of the chest.

♥ **HEART FOCUS:** Gently shift your attention to the area around your heart. Perhaps recall your heart is there and beating

♥ **HEART BREATHING:** Shift awareness to your breathing. If it's comfortable, perhaps tune into any awareness you can of breathing around the area of the heart

♥ **HEART FEELING:** Make the best effort you can to begin to active a genuine warm positive emotional feeling like appreciation or gratitude or care or love for someone, some place or something in your life. If you cannot, just 'point yourself in that direction and hold the intention

♥ Make a sincere effort to sustain positive emotional feelings (& perhaps physical comfort) radiating this to yourself, and perhaps others, but concentrate on yourself

♥ **MIND WANDERING & MINDFULNESS**
When you catch your mind wandering, gently but firmly lead your mind back, perhaps focus on your breathing again, and then reconnect with the practice and your effort to create a warm and positive emotions

IMAGINE the positive feeling growing like a comfort in your chest – perhaps warmth if that feels nice, and then let it radiate.

DO NOT WORRY about what you use to get in touch with the positive emotion – even a new material object will do – because it is just a bridge to the *feeling* you are after .. and feelings do not have words or pictures – they are just feelings..

FEEL IN CONTROL – if an image or memory is arising that is upsetting, change it for one that helps you activate a positive feeling. It's not about prolonged wandering into imagination (however nice), its about using an image or memory or idea to help activate the warm positive emotions.

THE MORE YOUR MIND WANDERS the more practice you will get in gently leading it back to the exercise – and that practice will help train your mind (“mindfulness”). Treat your mind in a kindly way – like training a puppy that keeps wandering

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Part II - building on your new skills

The Heartmath exercise draws on many traditional practices – for example the Buddhist meditation on compassion.

Building Compassion and Happiness

So try at times varying the basic exercise to build other skills such as compassion: imagine gathering up suffering like a dark cloud and breath it into the centre of a bright light in your heart. There imagine it is being transformed and breath it out as light radiating to yourself and others. Begin with your own suffering; later you can widen this to others. This will build compassion. The research shows that this enhances *your* mood and wellbeing, waking up the same positive emotion centre as antidepressants. Studies show this also helps the immune system.

Finding a Creative Way Forward

This next exercise is also from the Heartmath Institute . You will see that you use your new skills practiced in the main exercise – and then use that emotional place to guide yourself how to help yourself and tackle the difficulties you are facing

- ♥ Shift attention to area around the heart - breathing in through your heart and out through the solar plexus
- ♥ Make a sincere effort to activate a positive feeling (eg: genuine feeling of appreciation or care for someone, a place or something in your life)
- ♥ Ask yourself what would be an efficient effective attitude or action that would balance and de-stress your system
- ♥ Quietly sense any change in perception or feeling and sustain as long as possible (heart perceptions are often subtle, gently suggesting best solutions)

Coping Better ‘on the spot’: A further development is to call up this positive heart based feeling ‘on the spot’ when something difficult happens – emotionally step back, take a breath, activate your more balanced self and then decide how to respond. This takes a lot of practice!

HEARTMATH BASED PRACTICES

If you are interested in the science here are a few slides – see www.heartmath.org.

Applications of Heart Rate Variability Analysis:

Determine the relative balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems
Friedman, et al. J. Psychosom. Res. 1998

Predict increased risk of sudden cardiac death and all-cause mortality
Singer, et al. J. Electrocard. 1988. Tsuji, et al. The Framingham Heart Study. Cir 1994

Indicate fitness levels
Gallagher, et al. Clin. Auton. Res. 1992

Indicate nervous system aging rate
Umetani, et al., J. Am. Coll. Cardiol. 1998

Assess moment-to-moment changes in autonomic function and balance due to changes in mental or emotional states or stress
Wood, et al. J. Cardiopulm. Rehabil. 1998.

Benefits of Physiological Coherence

- Improved cognitive performance (McCraty, 2001)
- Increased calmness and well-being (Friedman, 2000)
- Increased emotional stability (McCraty, 2001)
- Reduced blood pressure in hypertension (McCraty, 2001)
- Increased functional capacity in CHF patients (Luskin, 2002)
- Improvements in asthma (Lehrer, 2000)

Increased Heart Rhythm Coherence Improves Cognitive Performance

Auditory Discrimination Task Mean Reaction Times

