

## **Stress Alleviation Intervention (S.A.I.) Techniques**

Those being severely emotionally and mentally affected may show elevations in pulse and blood pressure, and report anxiety, panic attacks, sleeplessness, restlessness, sadness, loss of energy, lack of enjoyment, and difficulties in relationships, as well as other similar stress related issues. The following information and instructions are usually given to patients in an individual session. Preferably, if possible, patients can be seen within a group setting in order to reach out to more people within the same period of time. During this COVID pandemic, people are restricted in their mobility due to isolation. Also, the demands on the health care system may not be able to keep up with great needs present. Therefore, familiarity with certain time-tested techniques can be very helpful for all. The following introduction and techniques can be used with friends and family to help deal with these issues.

### **Introduction:**

*Stress, trauma and shock all affect us in many ways. Dealing with it is critically important as it can lead to many diseases and disorders such as high blood pressure. If you have received medication to help, it is important to follow your doctor's advice with this. The medication can be very helpful. There also are exercises which can be very beneficial. The medication by itself is good. The exercises by themselves are good. When you combine them, it becomes very powerful. (This direction is given to encourage compliance with any medical regime prescribed by your health care professional)*

*So, let's look at these exercises. I am going to suggest three. One for each of three systems that are powerfully impacted by what you have gone through – the muscular, nervous and respiratory systems.*

### **Exercise 1 - For the Muscular System**

*Whenever the body is shocked, stressed or traumatized, there is a tendency for the muscles to tighten. This is normal. Unfortunately, when the event has passed, the tension may remain. This is especially true for those muscles in the stomach area, neck, lower back, shoulders and jaw. This tension can create pain in all those areas as well as contribute to high blood pressure. The following exercise is specifically aimed at helping to relieve the tension in the muscular system.*

**Step 1.** *Take a deep breathe and tighten all of your muscles – squeeze your eyes, tighten your fists, shoulders, chest, stomach, etc. (Have them do this for a very short time and check to see if there are any problems or pain. If so, suggest an adaptation such as pressing one hand against the other, e.g., in a case where a woman could not*

close one hand due to joint stiffness. In the case of pain, suggest that they not tighten that part of their body but instead focus on tensing another part.)

**Step 2.** *Now Take a deep breath and tighten. Hold it for a count of 5 (Count this out loud very slowly)*

**Step 3.** *Let the breath out and completely relax. (You can use the term “be like a noodle.” If the translator has difficulty translating this correctly, this can be cleared up by demonstrating what is meant. Also suggest they make an “ah” sound on the exhale as this helps loosen the throat. It is important to watch them do this, as there is a tendency to not loosen the hands. Bring their attention to wherever they are still holding tension and ask them to do steps 2 & 3 again.)*

Have them repeat this 2-3 times, and once you see that they are doing it somewhat correctly, ask if there are any questions. Then advise them to do this 5 times consecutively, 3-5 times per day. Tell them that this exercise is for the muscular system and there are other systems involved in this tension they are experiencing.

*The next one we will look at is the nervous system.*

## **Exercise 2 - For the Nervous System**

*During stressful or traumatic experiences, the nervous system goes into a “shock-like state” - almost as if it is stunned. This can result in a hyper-alert state with an exaggerated startle reflex (Demonstrate this). This keeps you on edge and prevents you from relaxing. This tension contributes to high blood pressure and can negatively affect your ability to sleep. It can leave you feeling anxious, nervous, drained and depressed. It keeps you in a “worried” state of mind. This next exercise helps soothe and relax the nervous system. This exercise is over 5000 years old.*

**Step 1.** *With your thumb of your right hand, press gently on your right nostril causing it to close. Exhale all the air out through the left nostril. Do this easily and gently.*

**Step 2.** *Keeping your right nostril closed, inhale easily through the left nostril.*

**Step 3.** *Now take your ring finger of the same hand and close the left nostril.*

**Step 4.** *Exhale gently out of your right nostril.*

**Step 5.** *Gently inhale through your right nostril.*

**Step 6.** *Repeat steps 1-5 for 2-3 minutes, 3X or more a day.*

The things that people have problems with in this exercise are the coordination, and wrongfully forcing the breath. Practice takes care of the coordination problem, but it

is important to stress that they do this exercise gently and easily for maximum benefit.

*Now that we have learned the exercises for the muscular and nervous systems, we turn our attention to the respiratory system.*

### **Exercise 3 - For the Respiratory System**

*The respiratory system is also impacted by traumatic events and stress. Generally, what happens is that you start to breathe a bit quicker and the breaths become shallower, not as deep. (Demonstrate what is meant with your hands on your chest, and showing the breathing rate and depth.) This results in less energy and contributes to anxiety and high blood pressure. It can cause your pulse to quicken and contribute to a sense of nervousness and worry. This next exercise will help you deepen and slow down your breathing.*

**Step 1** - *Sit in as relaxed a position as possible. (Ideally it would be best, if they could lie down). Now listen to the sound your breath makes on the inhalation and exhalation. (If they can't hear it, they can plug their ears with their fingers).*

**Step 2** - *Allow the sounds to become longer. (If needed suggest that they make the sounds longer consciously, or slow down the breath to make the sounds longer depending on what works best.) Remind them to stay relaxed and allow the breath to be gentle and easy going in, and even more gentle and easy going out. (There is a tendency for people to force the breath and that defeats the purpose of this exercise.)*

**Step 3** - *Relax and continue to listen to the sound, allowing the sound to get longer and the breath to get deeper (Elongate those words to emphasize the feeling of this exercise). Do this for a minimum of 2 to 3 minutes, 4 to 5 times a day. This exercise can be done as much as you feel comfortable and every day, if you want. (Basically, it is a form of Sathya Sai Baba's "So-Hum" meditation.) In areas predominantly Christian, it may be helpful to ask the patients to imagine the sound "Ah-men" (Amen) during the exercise as was done effectively in the Philippines during medical camps to treat survivors of the typhoon.*

At the close of the stress alleviation session, we review each exercise, answer any questions, and emphasize practicing these techniques of breathing regularly. Most of the participants feel the relaxation and relief within the class, and this usually encourages them to continue. Also mention that while these exercises can be practiced at any time of the day, it is a good idea to do them right before going to bed, as well.