

# OT WELL-BEING

MAGAZINE

**PRACTICAL  
STRATEGIES**

for occupational therapists

INTEGRATIVE

MINDFULNESS

MEDITATION

BREATHWORK

LIMITED EDITION

EMMY VADNAIS & RHIANNON CRISPE

# EDITORS

Hello!

We are Emmy and Rhiannon—two passionate occupational therapists who love taking an integrative approach to health and well-being.

We are the creators of the OT Well-Being Summit; an online course full of education and practical lifestyle optimisation strategies to help you to support your clients (in any practice area).

In this one-of-a-kind OT Well-Being Magazine we want to share some key take-aways that we learnt!

We now know that 80% of chronic health conditions, such as heart disease and stroke and be prevented by *healthy lifestyle choices*, according to the World Health Organization.

We also know that you want to help your clients be well, prevent disease, and have more options for care to lower stress, anxiety, depression, pain, and return to meaningful occupations more quickly.

More OTs want to bring health and wellness into their practice and many integrative health approaches can help do this.

These approaches can also help with your own self-care!

*Emmy & Rhiannon*

*xxx*



*DISCLAIMER: It is recommended that all individuals seek professional advice from their primary health care provider before making any changes to their lifestyle. The ideas and information in this e-magazine are not substitute for medical care.*

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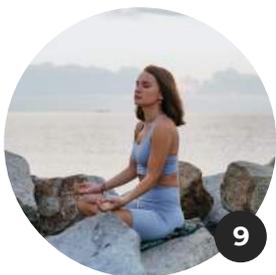
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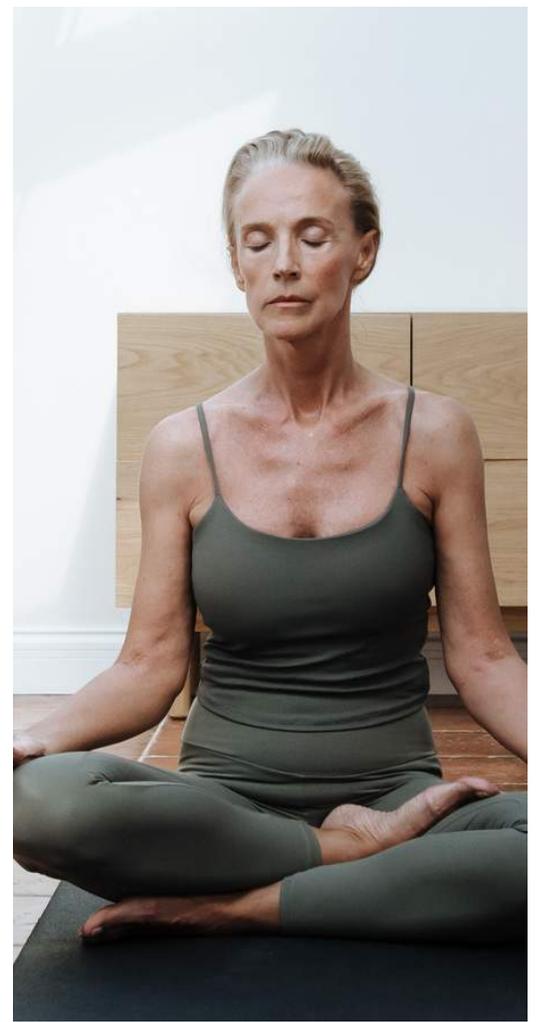
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### **Breathwork**

More and more OTs are using breathwork in their practice. Why? Because there are many researched health benefits and it is our life force. If we don't breathe we will die. And if we don't breathe well, we may have health consequences.

When we slow down the mind and focus on slow and even breathing, it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, also known as the relaxation response--rest and digest response that is the opposite of the stress response--the fight, flight or freeze response. This may also help lower pain and boost the mood.

You can observe your clients' breath and posture to see how well they are breathing.

Are they breathing shallow, rapidly, or high up in their chest? Are they kyphotic and rounded in their shoulder? Chances are they're not breathing well.

A simple strategy to help your clients breathe well could include Pranayama. This is a yogic breath pattern. *Prana* means breath, energy, vitality, and strength. *Yama* means stretching, extending, and regulation.

*continued next page...*

**The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) identifies Health and Wellness as one of the six key practice areas in OT.**

**AOTA supports the use of integrative health in OT in the Occupational Therapy and Complementary Health Approaches and Integrative Health position paper from published in 2017. This allows OT to provide complementary modalities as part of our occupation-based treatment, as long as we are trained and include appropriate cultural and ethical client considerations.**



This is also known as or like diaphragmatic breathing—taking a full breath in and letting the abdomen expand, so the diaphragm can drop or expand, and the lungs can fill with a larger amount of oxygen.

This can help steady the mind by lowering mind chatter. This may help improve judgment and discernment, connect to the present moment, and even connect to spirituality.

Breathwork is a great foundation for meditation and yoga.

Breathwork can be instructed to clients as a **preparatory method before ADL's** to improve participation and successful completion of tasks. It can be taught to clients as a **form of ADL** to manage stress, pain, and to have more meaning and purpose in life.

**Guide your clients to harness the power of the mind body and spirit to achieve their occupational goals in life.**



# ABDOMINAL BREATHING

It is helpful to begin any relaxation time with a few slow deep breaths in and out.

Diaphragm breathing is one of the most effective ways to slow the body down. Focusing on your Breath is one of the first steps in slowing your mind and relaxing your body.

Diaphragm, abdominal breathing, or deep breathing allows your lungs to fill completely, while your body and mind relax.

“Would you prefer to sit or lie down?”

Get into a comfortable position. Bring your attention to your breathing, notice your breathing.

Take a couple slow deep breaths in and out...

You may place your hand on your abdomen so you can feel where your breath is. When breathing in, allow your abdomen to expand as your hand rises.

When breathing out, allow your abdomen and your hand to come back toward your body.

This may feel a little different to you than how you normally breathe, with practice you will naturally breathe this way.

Allow your belly to rise with each breath in. And come toward your body with each breath out.

Continue to diaphragm breathe during relaxation time in an unforced, relaxed manner. Once you practice enough, it will become second nature to you. “Let the air breathe for you...”

Diaphragm breathing allows for more relaxation as you are letting your diaphragm expand fully so you are able to get more oxygen. Also, as you are not breathing up in your chest, your shoulders and upper body muscles are able to relax and not work so hard, thus allowing the rest of the muscles in your body to relax.

## HOW TO

**Abdominal Breathing  
for Relaxation -  
Practical Application.**

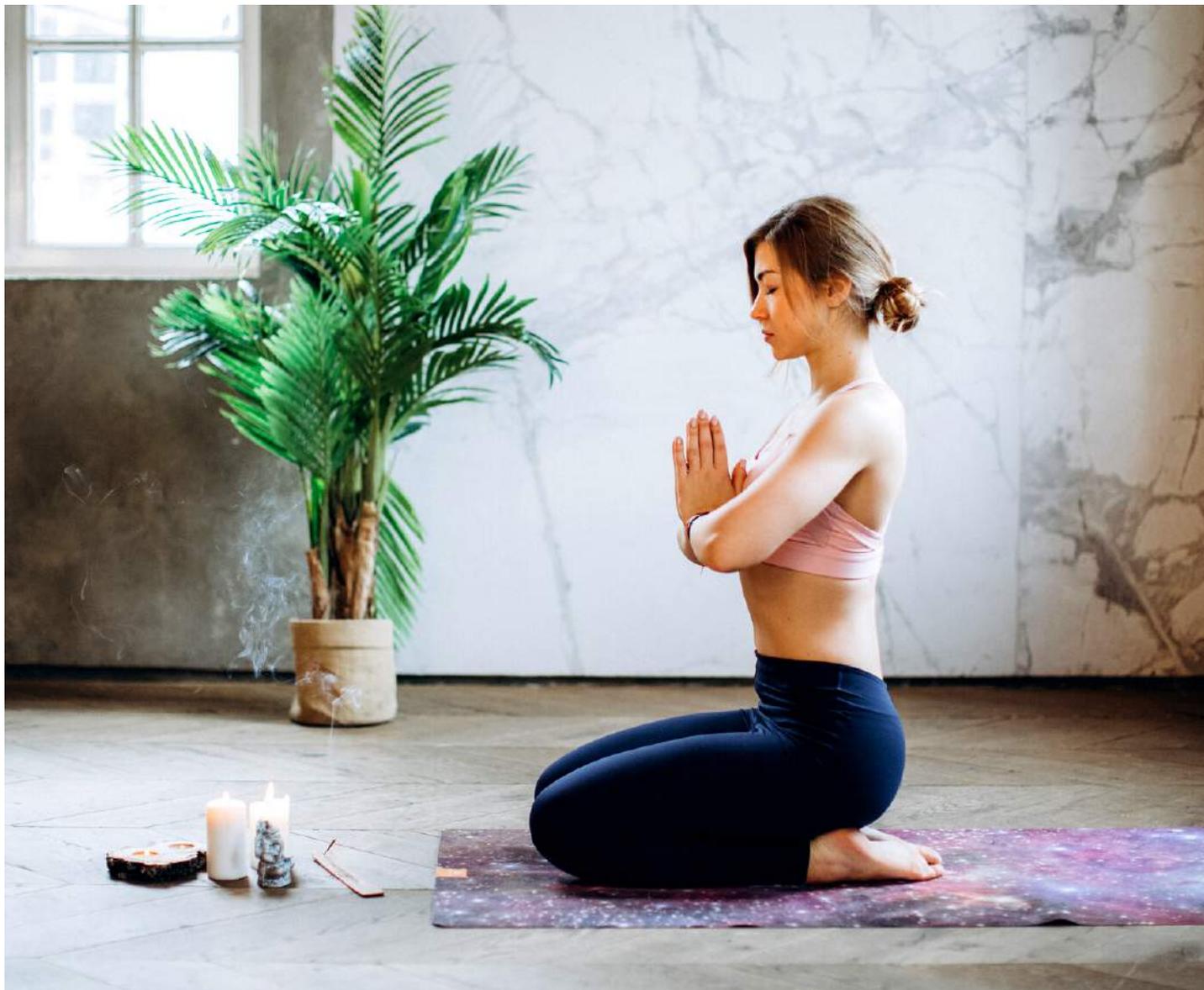
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# *Meditation & The Relaxation Response*

RELAXATION IS THE  
ANTIDOTE FOR THE  
STRESS RESPONSE

---

**While there are several types of meditation, the common feature seems to be that they all can induce the relaxation response, coined by Herbert Benson, MD. Director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) at Massachusetts General Hospital, Benson also is professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and author or co-author of more than 190 scientific publications and twelve books. His body of work demonstrates scientific research on the mind-body connection and the power of the mind in healing. There is so much emphasis on “doing” in our culture that we can unwittingly reach unhealthy levels. We do need a certain amount of movement, energy, stress, or tension to move us forward in our lives.**

Stress can enhance performance to a point, but when a line is crossed, excessive stress impedes performance and can cause or exacerbate illness or disease.

Fear, worry, anxiety, negative thought patterns, racing heart, high blood pressure, anger, greater vulnerability to pain, as well as poor sleep, eating habits, and lifestyle choices can all be exacerbated by stress.

Relaxation can help us to “rest and digest” and is the antidote for the stress response that can cause our “fight, flight, or freeze” actions.

**The relaxation response is characterized by:**

- Lowered heart rate
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced breathing rate
- Lowered metabolism
- Calmer brain activity
- Increased attention and decision-making functions of the brain
- Increased inhaled nitrous oxide, which counters negative effects of the stress hormone norepinephrine (noradrenaline)
- Changes in gene activity that are the opposite of those associated with stress



**Regular elicitation of the Relaxation Response can prevent, and compensate for, the damage incurred by frequent nervous reactions that pulse through our hearts and bodies.**

Herbert Benson



Above  
Text about the article photo  
would fit perfectly here.



### **Mindfulness Neuroscience Research**

Meditation can change structures of the brain just after eight weeks of meditating regularly. People who had never meditated before went through an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program.

Researchers found thickening [likely the result of the creation of new neuronal connections] in four regions:

1. the posterior cingulate, which is involved in mind wandering and self-relevance;
2. the left hippocampus, which assists in learning, cognition, memory, and emotional regulation;

3. the temporo-parietal junction, which is associated with perspective taking, empathy, and compassion; and

4. the pons, an area of the brainstem where a lot of regulatory neurotransmitters are produced.

An area that got smaller was the amygdala, the fight-or-flight part of the brain, which is important for anxiety, fear, and stress in general.

Long-term meditators have an increased amount of gray matter in the insula and sensory regions, as well as the auditory and sensory cortex.

Probably because when you're mindful, you're paying attention to your breath, sounds, and the present moment.

They have more gray matter in the frontal cortex, which is associated with working memory and executive decision-making.

Fifty-year-old meditators had the same amount of gray matter in their prefrontal cortex as twenty-five-year-olds.

The cortex shrinks with age and can cause a decrease in cognition and memory.

References:  
*(click on link)*

- [1\) Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness](#)
- [2\) Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density.](#)



# *How To Meditate*

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1. Begin with Abdominal Breathing, Progressive Relaxation, or Special Place Imagery.
  - a. **Open Heart**
  - b. Mindfulness–Loving Yourself
  - c. **Inner Wisdom**
  - d. **Small Universe**
2. Adjust room light and temperature, and limit noise and distractions as best you can. You may want to have a shawl or blanket in case you get cool.
3. You may play soft music to enhance the experience. Although some people find this distracting.
4. Select a posture and get into a comfortable position.
5. Begin with your breath.
6. Close your eyes or find a focus point in the room.
7. Continue with your meditation for your desired length of time.

8. Come back to the room when you're ready and open your eyes or stop focusing on a specific point.

## **Length of Time**

When beginning your meditation practice, you may want to meditate for five to ten minutes, and then work your way up to thirty minutes. Over time you may want to meditate for up to an hour. If meditating longer than an hour, take a break each hour to stretch and move your body. However, thirty minutes to an hour is plenty of time each day. Some people find it helpful to meditate for shorter periods twice a day. Having a watch or clock nearby can help you keep track of time. Some people like having a timer. Most smart-phones have this feature. If this is available, select a gentle sound to call you back to the room.

## **When to Meditate**

Daily, find a time of day to meditate. Develop a routine of meditating the same time every day, even if you feel you only have five minutes to do so. The more you meditate and experience the calm and peace within yourself, the more likely you will want to meditate longer.

# Meditation

## Be Gentle and Patient with Yourself

Allow what happens to happen. Do not force anything to happen or become frustrated. Let go of any preconceived ideas of what should be happening. Each meditation experience will be different. That is why it's important to have a beginner's mind, even if you have been meditating for years.

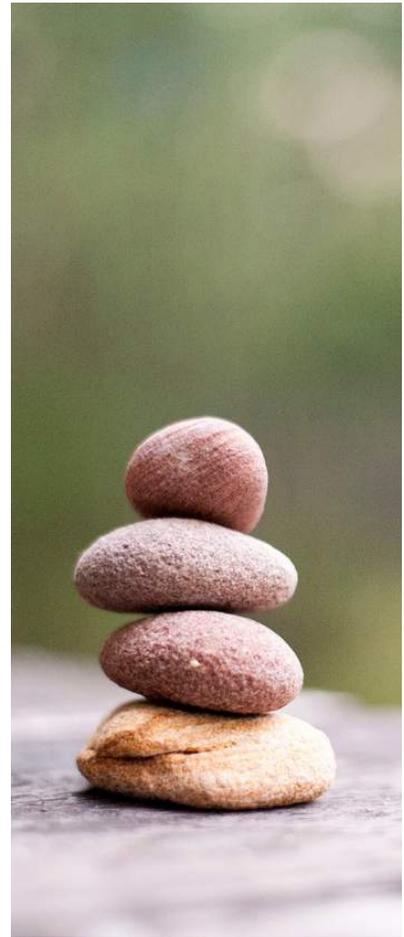
## Meditation Takes Practice, Just Like Learning Any Other Skill

If you try to make something happen (such as wanting to feel nirvana right now) or resist something that is happening (feeling tired, bored, or self-critical), you may perpetuate frustration or failure feelings; therefore accept or observe what is happening without judgment or simply allow thoughts to come and go. When thoughts or physical or emotional feelings arise (and they will), notice and observe them without judgment. Imagine them floating away like a cloud in the sky or a leaf flowing lazily down a stream. If they return, allow them to be, and bring your focus back to your meditation.

If thoughts or feelings persist, they may be trying to get your attention to tell you something.

Compassionately observe what is occurring with detached and loving curiosity. These persistent thoughts or feelings may need to be processed so you can discern between your emotions and your intuition.

In the beginning, if you find it is difficult to focus for long periods of time, you may want to practice focusing on your breath to develop concentration. If you begin to feel anxious or worry, you may want to restart after ten to twenty minutes of stretching, yoga, or aerobic exercise to discharge extra energy. **Move toward acceptance, love, and compassion for yourself.** Over time, you will find a routine that will work best for you to continue with regularity. It takes practice just like learning any other skill. Be patient and gentle with yourself. Coming back from a meditative state can be similar to waking from sleep. Journaling or drawing can be important, after-meditation practices. Repressed mental and emotional material may come to the surface while meditating.



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# Healthy Eating Habits

NOURISHING  
OCCUPATIONS

Eating is an everyday occupation. What we consume can take us a step towards health and wellbeing, or a step away from it.

In today's fast-paced convenience-driven world, where over half the American population has at least one chronic disease, there is no time like the present to positively impact lives through nourishing routines and rituals.

As occupational therapists we can support clients with meal planning, meal preparation and grocery shopping to help build health promoting habits.

We can help clients create sustainable lifestyle routines embedded in the context of their social and physical environment.

It is with our unique OT lens that we understand that making improvements to eating habits can result in improvements in occupational performance and participation.

To learn more about how you can help your clients with healthy eating habits join us at The OT Well-Being Summit!

The OT Well-Being Summit:

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*join us at*

# The OT Well-Being Summit

The OT Well-Being Summit empowers occupational therapists around the globe to have confidence with holistic health and wellness skills for their OT practice.

We bring together 11 occupational therapists who share strategies and tools that you can use in your occupational therapy sessions today with the confidence (and evidence) to use them.

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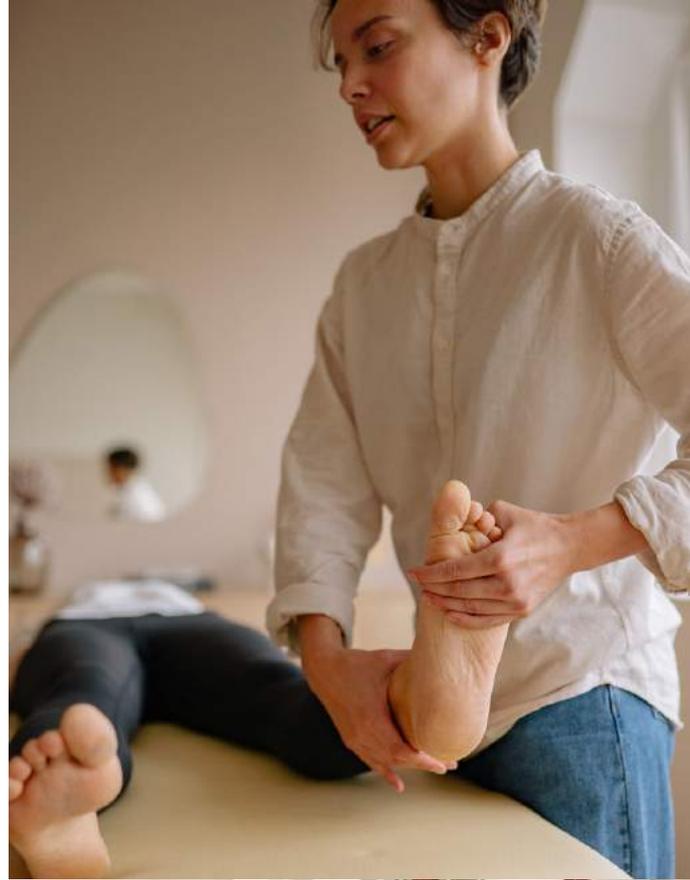
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# The OT Well-Being Summit

## TOPICS

- **Achieve Your Dreams with Intuitive Development, Meditation, and Guided Imagery**
- **Trauma Informed Practices for Occupational Therapists**
- **Breath Work in Every Day Activities**
- **Mindfulness: Powerful Exercises and Practical Tools For Your Everyday OT Toolbox**
- **OT Coaching and Motivational Interviewing**
- **Acupressure and OT: The Power of Touch to Heal**
- **Yoga in Occupational Therapy: A Holistic System for Health and Wellness**
- **Embracing Reiki and Energy Healing Within Our OT Sessions**
- **Nutrition and Healthy Eating: A Universal Occupation**
- **Embracing Diversity, Appreciating Culture, and Validating The Humanity in All of Us**
- **The Benefits of Nature Through An Occupational Lens and How To Incorporate It Into Your Work**



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