

As difficult as we might attempt, we can't control the challenges that occur in our everyday life. Between family and work, our schedules mostly get filled up to the stage where we feel that we just can't continue, or we suffer from unpredicted health issues that throw our well-arranged plans awry. In spite of all, we need to do, even the simplest of tasks – such as arranging a trip to the supermarket or writing that late email – can feel overwhelming.

Either big or small, these challenges can make us feel nervous, stressed out or even depressed. However, as overwhelming as our feelings might be, there's a manner in which we can control manage them. Utilizing the simple, adaptable guided exercises of sophrology, we can learn to breathe better, think more positively and let go of our concerns.

## Sophrology is a dynamic mixture of Western medicine and Eastern meditative methods.

Visiting the doctor doesn't do the trick sometimes. You might go through a series of tests, take medications and yet you still don't feel okay.

That's an indication that it's time to look outside conventional medicine. To what? How about sophrology which is a healing practice that concentrates on bringing back the balance between mind and body as a method of attaining our overall health and happiness.

The term "sophrology" represents the idea of balance. It's gotten from the word sophrosyne, which is a word used by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato to signify balance and harmony between body, mind, and soul.

The practice of sophrology was formed by Alfonso Caycedo a Spanish doctor that was born in 1932. While he was studying medicine in Madrid, Caycedo saw himself challenging the restrictions of Western medical treatment; he was particularly disheartened by the electroshock treatment that mentally ill patients were exposed to at the hospital where he was working. This violent manner – which regularly causes comas in the patients –made him question why consciousness should have to be shaken for people to heal.

Obviously, Western medicine was limited in its ability to solve illness – particularly mental illness. Due to this, he began looking for means to go beyond it.

Caycedo started traveling in 1965 and he went to India and Japan, where he spent his years studying Eastern methods to healing.

In India, he worked with yogis and doctors to understand better the power of breathwork and bodywork in changing consciousness. He went to Dharamshala to learn more about Tibetan Buddhism. He learned about the principles of Zen meditation in Japan.

When he went back to Spain, he dedicated himself to merging the practices he had learned with his Western medical training, blending yoga, Buddhist meditation and Zen meditation with neurology, psychology, and psychiatry. The outcome was sophrology.

Between the 1960s to 1980s, Caycedo kept on improving the practice with his patients. Creating guided exercises that combined breathing methods, meditation, and visualization, he organized the practice into the 12 Levels of Sophrology, a series of clear steps intended at assisting you to realize, master and change your consciousness. It takes at least a couple of years to perfect these 12 Levels, however even the fundamentals of sophrology – the Foundation and Level 1 Practices – will put you on your way to well-being.

Best of all, sophrology is created to be adaptable to every lifestyle, fitness level and schedule, so anybody can practice it– it doesn't even require a yoga mat.

## The first stage to restoring your mind-body connection is through Sophrology Foundation Practice.

You don't begin by putting a frame or the upper floors or doors and windows when you are constructing a building. In construction, as in a lot of things, you begin with the foundation. Sophrology is similar too.

Before you can improve through sophrology's 12 Levels, you have to first know about the Foundation Practice. This practice anchors you in your senses, connects your mind and body and puts you into a relaxed-alert state, one which revives your consciousness – the vital power that connects your psychic and physical selves.

The Foundation Practice is founded on three exercises which are the Body Scan, the Clearing Breath and Tuning into Your Vital Power. The Clearing Breath assists you to clear physical pressures, and Tuning into Your Vital Power enables you to tap into your consciousness. The Body Scan is the first phase in linking the mind and body together.

You start the exercise by sitting in a chair in a relaxed position. Take time to feel the weight and heft of your body on the chair. In the meantime, inhale and exhale gradually. Now begin to scan through each of your body systems in your mind's eye. There are five body systems in sophrology; the head and face which are the first system. The second is the shoulders, neck, and arms. The third system is the chest region; the upper tummy region is the fourth system, while the lower tummy, pelvis, and legs are the fifth system.

In the Body Scan, you slowly move through each body system, concentrating on your sensations and observing any tensions stored in your body. Keep on inhaling and exhaling deeply. While sitting, use the power of your breath to relax each body system.

This exercise is very effective in reconnecting your mind and body. By concentrating your mind on your physical sensations, the Body Scan enables you to become more conscious of your body and summons it to relax. This state enables you present to perceptions and sensations in a way that enables the change of your consciousness.

It looks too good to be true? Just attempt it. See how your body and mind feel before and after the exercise. Probabilities are, once you're done with it, you'll see that your body is more relaxed and your mind is more alert.

There you have it – you've gotten into the state of relaxed-alert. Or, in fancy sophrological parlance, you've gotten into the sophroliminal state. Feels very good, doesn't it?

# Sophrology's Level 1 Practice lets you balance your mind and body positively.

We live in our bodies. We utilize them every minute of our lives. And yet, how regularly do we actually listen to them?

Between family duties, challenging work schedules and the fast-paced nature of life generally, we're more likely to be stuck in our nervous thoughts. We have the tendency to forget that our worrying minds are part and portion of our bodies.

This is where sophrology's Level 1 Practice comes to play. There are 12 levels to sophrology. The first four levels compose of the Discovery Cycle, the next four the Mastery Cycle and the last four the Transformative Cycle. Working through these levels enables us to notice, master and change our consciousness.

However, we don't need to use all 12 levels to get the advantages of sophrology – the Level 1 Practice takes us a long way. Through gentle movement and breathing methods, this practice balances our bodies and minds. It allows us to become our own “on-the-go” healers by aiding us to release the stresses that refrain us.

Deliberate the Level 1 Head Rotation exercise. It's concentrated on the first body system which is the head and face and it entails standing comfortably in one place, our head aligned with our face straight ahead as we inhale in and out. Afterward, as we inhale extremely, we gradually turn our heads to the right and then to the left. When we feel the desire to exhale, we put back our heads to face the front.

Facing forward, we take little time to sense sensations in our first body system. Perhaps we feel somewhat giddy from refraining our breath. Perhaps we feel more relaxed. Or it could be that we become conscious of tensions in our head of which we didn't previously know. Once we've recorded these sensations, we then repeat the move repeatedly a lot of time. We finish it by facing front on the exhales once again.

The Head Rotation exercise has a lot of advantages if done continually. The gentle head movements, in addition to the deep breathing, ground us in our bodies. Additionally, movements

and breathing increase in brain oxygenation. Also, they clear and focus our minds. Thus, the exercise enables us to connect our minds and bodies while positively balancing them out.

Guess what? Level 1 exercises like the Head Rotation doesn't take more than 15 minutes. However, through repetition and routine, they recenter us, renovate our energy levels and also improve our mood as well as focus.

## The super tools of sophrology enable us to let go of negativity.

We all hear a voice in our heads. The voice that regularly says to us that there's no point attempting anything because it will yield to failure. That we're not good enough. That other people can do it better.

If we allow it to get the best of us, that negative voice will restrict our ambition and reduce our confidence. It will also stop us in our tracks instead of letting us spread our wings and fly. That negative voice feels overwhelming regularly. It can be very powerful that it hinders us from connecting with our inborn powers of positivity.

Fortunately, sophrology provides super tools to hold that voice. Consider the Supertool Practice as a quick toolkit into which we can attain to overcome the challenges we encounter in our daily lives as well as negative emotions, thoughts or circumstances. These simple tools offer us with resilience, confidence, and calm whenever we require it immediately. They combine breathing, motion, awareness, and intention. In doing so, they create changes that let us effect change.

For example, when that negative inner voice disturbs our day, one super tool we can hold is The Bag. How does it work? Firstly, you need to look for a quiet and private corner. As you are in the place, begin to think about how you're about to change your negative thoughts, beliefs, and emotions into something that is positive.

Then with closed eyes, imagine that there's a bag in front of you hanging on a wall. Use some time to imagine this bag in detail. After you have done that, put everything that worries you into it, even if it's negative feelings, emotions or regrets. As you put each item inside it, breathe out and, in your thoughts, mention the negative item that you've just placed in.

This is the fun part. Stay in a karate position and blow the bag with a few Karate moves even if it's like that of experts – or an inexperienced. Regardless of whether or not you know martial arts. The main thing is to portray damaging the bag. Lastly, reach down to collect the “dust” of the damaged bag and blow the dust out into the world, asking for it to be changed into something positive.

If what is mentioned above sounds silly, just think about how you felt before starting the exercise and how you feel after doing it. You'll feel lighter, more positive and more empowered after you blow that dust to the world. This is why The Bag is known as a super tool.

## The super tools of sophrology can enable you to sleep well at night.

Wouldn't it be good if you could work on only four hours' sleep a night? Think about how much you could achieve then. But, few people can endure on very little sleep. A lot of people experience the opposite problem – they want to sleep a lot however, they struggle with it.

If you've had insomnia, you know how awful it can make you feel. Lack of sleep is bad for you. Parts of the effects of lack of sleep are exhaustion and lack of energy, muscle pain, as well as depression. Also, Insomnia mostly causes compensating bad behaviors, like over-eating and smoking, both of which can further disrupt your health.

But, the good news is that you don't need to depend on sleeping pills to get better sleep at night. That's because sophrology trains you with super tools for coping with insomnia.

Sleep Gatekeeper is one of such super tool. Different from what you might anticipate, this exercise has to be done in the day. Why is this so? This is because, by doing it during the day, it prepares your mind hours before your night sleep.

A main feature of the exercise is selecting a special word that can be the “gatekeeper” of your sleep. This word can be anything meaningful to you and it will keep out the fears and anxieties that could enter your sacred realm of sleep. During the day, sit down for a few minutes.

Afterward, say your gatekeeper word and slowly visualize breathing it into your body as you breathe in.

After you've breathed in the word, visualize a positive and soothing bedtime ahead of you. Imagine yourself falling asleep quickly and comfortably. While you imagine your bedtime, breathe gradually and call your gatekeeper word as a way to impart it with the power to protect your sleep realm. As you lie in bed at night, call your gatekeeper word once again and let it take you into calm and restorative sleep.

It looks easy, right? Yes, it is; however, there's a warning. A lot of the power of the Sleep Gatekeeper exercise stems from repetition. Meaning, doing the exercise only once in a month wouldn't work. You have to do it daily because it's only by repetition that your gatekeeper word, and associated imagination, will have the power to change your sleep routines.

Now relax, shut your eyes and call up your gatekeeper word. Do you feel yourself nodding off already?

## Sophrology enables you to be empowered instead of being restricted by your past.

Do you see yourself worrying about your past and you start to remember all the things you've done wrong? It's very easy to recall those times when you weren't pleased, fell short of attaining a goal or said or did something wrong.

However, such thoughts can be harmful. Thinking about past mistakes traps you in the negative circumstances of a previous life and restricts your potential for the future. This can cause the false belief that you're ruined to do the same cycle over and over again.

This is the reason why remembering instances in your past when you were successful, happy and confident is so essential—taking the time to recognize positive instances in your past creates the foundation for your future happiness. Remembering the situations where you have felt empowered and happy indicates to your consciousness that you are capable of doing the same in the future.

Definitely, this is easier said than done. However, guided sophrology exercises like the Empowering Past Visualization exercise are a great place to begin. This exercise is derived from Level 3 practice. It's easy, short and very effective just like a lot of other sophrology exercises.

The fundamentals of the exercise entail sitting in a chair in an upright position. You have to use the Foundation Practice to get into a relaxed-alert state before you start the exercise. This gets your mind and body ready to be more open to impressions as well as sensations.

Once you get to that state, search vigorously through your past to find a very exact moment – when you felt really empowered and confident. Maybe it was the day you got promoted at work or perhaps when you did well in public. Attempt to recall all the information once you have recognized that moment. What were you wearing that day? Were you sitting or standing and how? Who were you talking to? Crucially, remember how you felt at that point.

Let your mind concentrate on those past feelings of confidence, success, as well as empowerment, then live in them. Allow those feelings to flow into your body. After you are done doing that, relax into your chair and end with a slow exhale. Concentrate on how you feel after the end of the exercise. Perhaps, very elevated.

If, as they say, the past is certainly not the past, hence, why not use your past to buoy you up instead of put you down?

## Sophrology assists us in transforming our relationship to the future through the power of visualization.

You know the saying of “wishing doesn't make it so?” Well, what if it did? What if, through the absolute power of our imaginations, we could change our relationship into the future in order for it brings us more energy and inspiration?

Even though the future is full of potentials for positive change, more often than not we're scared of it. For one thing, we can't be certain that the choices we make presently will bring about



happiness or success. Also, our dread that the future may bring about bad things a lot of stresses or challenges – can enable us to stick to the safe route instead of risk thinking boldly.

But, it's merely with a mindset open to positive change that we can bring bigger and better potentials for our lives to come. This involves the courage to visualize the future differently from what we understand or what we might expect it to be.

Sophrology enables us to tap into this power of possibility. Through the use of visualization exercises and tools, it changes our relationship to the future in order for us to see it as an opportunity instead of a risk.

For instance, the Level 2 Future Visualization exercise, enables you to practice this power of possibility concretely by guiding you to the close future. You need to deliberately think of what you want to change before you start the exercise. Perhaps, it could be something as easy as finding more time to relax. Or maybe something bigger like a career change.

Then, sitting in a chair, fast-forward into your future, to maybe between six months and two years' time. Once you are there, let a scene, with your there, enter your mind. In this scene, the change that you desire has been attained.

You feel wonderful. As you breathe, imagine all the information like who you're with and what you're talking about or doing. Spend time living in this scene until it feels true.

During the end of the exercise, inhale the uplifting feeling of the imagination and let it flow through your body. Like this, your mind is also guided to be ready for this positive transformation.

This powerful visualization exercise is only one of the numerous in the sophrology toolbox that will cause positive transformation. With the Foundation Practice, the 12 Levels practices and the super tools of sophrology, there's no refraining you.

# The Life-Changing Power of Sophrology: Breathe and Connect with the Calm and Happy You by Dominique Antiglio

## Book Review

Become your own “on-the-go” healer by learning the basic principles of sophrology which is a healing practice that mixes elements of Western medicine with Eastern meditative methods. Because its tools and exercises are easy, fast and adaptable to all types of lifestyles as well as schedules, sophrology enables you to get the better of life instead of allowing life get the better of you.

Change your breath.

Now, use a few minutes to improve your breathing. Use a comfortable chair and place one hand on your stomach, the other one on your chest. Then breathe as you usually do – don’t force it, be natural with it. Can you feel the motion in the chest? If that is the case, concentrate on inhaling and exhaling out of your stomach rather than your chest. Feeling the movement with your hand, visualize your tummy like a balloon that expands and deflates. Tummy breathing in this manner is a good shortcut to relieving stress.

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