

2. CHANGE YOUR BODY, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

This chapter is about a healthy body and a healthy brain. Both are necessary to be successful and happy. We first think correctly with our brain and then carry out the appropriate actions with our body. For this purpose, we want to train the body to be healthy and the brain vibrant by scientifically tested techniques. Here again, we need not believe in anything to start with, but experiment with it and as it works adapt it to our daily lives.

Scientists have shown that regular exercise is good for all of us. I agree with them. But I found that it takes too much time and depends on too many factors beyond my control. For walking in a park, the weather has to be good. To be safe, it has to be done when there is enough light and other people are around. Going to a gym for a workout depends again on the weather and the hours the gym is open. Many times it is boring to work on a machine. I bought an exercise bike because I don't have much space in my apartment for any other exercise equipment. I did the exercise for a while, but it got monotonous and I gave up. Basically, I am not an exercise person and if I exercise I need quick results without dieting. Some people like to work out. They should continue the workout and add to it the following exercises which are quick and easy.

I came across a series of breathing exercises on Youtube that I can do early in the morning at home for thirty minutes to an hour five days a week and that have an instant pay off. It is not that I did not know about these earlier in my life. Having grown up in India, I was exposed to different types of yoga postures and breathing techniques from childhood. But practicing them also became a chore and was monotonous. But in revisiting yoga, I saw a package of exercises, which can keep my enthusiasm going and which informed me how each exercise helps me to be disease and stress free. It helped me and my wife who is diabetic to have energy throughout the day. The package was developed by a teacher, Baba Ramdev, who has taught at least two hundred million people -- Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Zoroastrians and people of all religions in India and around the world. The teachers he has developed around the world teach for free or for a nominal fee. The information is also available on the internet, e.g., [Baba Ramdev « Yoga Youtube | Meditation, Asana, & Pranayama ...](#)

Of course, caution must be taken and a doctor's advice must be sought before beginning any exercise. I am listing several breathing exercises in the following paragraphs. *Women who are pregnant or who are menstruating should not do the second, third a and b exercises.* The reason is that these exercises give work out to uterus also and might cause stress. Any exercise should be done with care and without exerting oneself. The whole set of exercises can be shortened to twenty or thirty minutes.

All these exercises are simple. Ramdev's message is inspiring and he explains the various ailments cured and the benefits of the exercises. If you listen to him while doing any exercise, do not stop doing the exercise unless you are tired. Even then, stop for only half a minute or so.

1. He introduces the bhastrika (bhas-trik;) (filling the lungs and exhaling fully by force in each cycle, about eight times a minute) to be done for two to three minutes. It is not hyperventilation. He gets you started and talks about its benefits.

2. After three minutes of bhastrika, he comes back and starts on kapalbhati (kap;l-bh;ti): exhaling rapidly in each cycle moving the stomach, inhaling brief, about 55 times a minute. (Kap;l – is forehead, bh;ti – shines. The exercise brings a glow to the face and forehead while

curing various diseases.) Again, he gives various explanations. He recommends doing this for 10 to 15 minutes with four or five short breaks if you are tired. This is first of the two long breathing exercises. This exercise pumps out all toxins and germs of diseases from various parts of the body.

3 a. After 15 minutes, he comes back and starts bhujangha exercise, where after breathing out forcefully, one has to apply three locks to the body: The first is bending the neck to touch the chest. The second is drawing the stomach in, as much as possible near the spine. He does it, but don't get discouraged if you cannot do it as much as he does. The third is pulling up the area of the body from below the area between anus and genitals. This is done three or four times. This is a good exercise for the stomach and pancreas.

3 b. Agnisarasana is another version of the exercise where while breathing out forcefully and locking the neck the stomach is pulled in and out with the spine erect. Again, do not try to do what he does. In yoga, the general rule is whatever one can do, one should do without exertion. This is done about three times. This exercise is good to reduce the tummy! These two exercises take about three minutes.

4. Anuloma-viloma (anu -lom vi-lom) is the fourth exercise and is the second long exercise lasting 10 to 15 minutes. Start by exhaling from the left nostril and inhaling while closing the right nostril with the right thumb, and then exhaling through the right nostril with the right thumb closing the left nostril with three fingers – third, fourth and little fingers, the forefinger pointing upwards. He gets you started and again talks about its benefits. It is also called “alternative breathing” and is taught to asthma patients in some hospitals.

5. After this exercise, he does bhramari (humming like a bee) with left and right forefingers together on the forehead above the eyebrows, closing each ear pressing tissue near the ear canal with thumbs, closing the eyes and placing three fingers of each hand together on the bridge of the nose. (Cut your nails beforehand, since they might dig into the skin.) Do not touch the eyes. Breathe in normally and breathe out slowly through nostrils with a hum. Experience of this exercise shows that the sound waves inside can be shifted to the brain, eyes, nose, ears and throat. The sound waves bathe the brain, balance chemistry of inner ear fluids, pressure in eyes, clear nasal passages and regulate throat, voice and diction. This has cured my wife's vertigo of thirty years. Do this exercise is for about two to three minutes.

6. The last but on exercise called “Udgatana” is done inhaling normally and exhaling with a sound of long ‘AUM’, to be repeated for about three minutes.

7. The last exercise is relaxed breathing with closed eyes, focusing on the middle of the eyebrows for about three minutes.

These are the different breathing exercises that take about a half hour.

Change Your Brain, Change Your Life

Medical science is of the opinion that the “Automatic Negative Thoughts” (ANTs) that arise in one's mind have a detrimental effect on the body. I practice the message of Self-image given in the previous chapter, and steering my mind away from any negative thoughts about myself or others if they happen to crawl in unknowingly. I am vigilant about it. Following some people's advice, I have also practiced consciously positive thought, word and action for many years and this type of thinking has become a habit. From my experience as well as that of others, it is possible to say that one can train oneself to kill ANTs and practice Positive Psychology.

Then I came across Dr. Amen's presentation on an Educational Channel. He is a well-known psychiatrist and has 62 clinics around the world. He has helped hundreds of thousands of people and can be found on the internet by searching for Dr. Amen's clinics.

Here are some of the excerpts from his presentation

Your brain is like a muscle. The more you use it, the more you can use it. New learning causes new connections in the brain. No learning causes the brain to start disconnecting itself. No matter what your age, mental exercise has a global, positive effect on the brain.

He gives various tips for mental workouts. He also says the following.

There's a reason the saying "you'll worry yourself to death" is part of our culture of cliché. How we think affects every part of us, including our bodies. We're increasingly aware of just how much brain function affects our bodies.

Over the years I've developed an entire program of cognitive therapy called "ANT therapy." ANT stands for Automatic Negative Thoughts and it's these automatic thoughts that are so unproductive and unhelpful. I've identified nine different negative thought patterns that invade and destroy our lives. Here are four...

Mind reading -- predicting you know that another person is thinking something negative about you without them telling you. I often tell my patients that, "A negative look from someone else may mean nothing more than he or she is constipated. You don't know. You can't read minds. I have 25 years of training in human behavior and I still can't read anyone's mind."

Fortune telling -- predicting a bad outcome to a situation before it has occurred. Your mind makes happen what it sees. Unconsciously, predicting failure will often cause failure. For example, if you say, "I know I will fail the test," then you will likely not study hard enough and fail the test.

Always or never thinking -- this is where you think in words like always, never, every time, or everyone. These thoughts are overgeneralizations which can alter behavior. For example, I have a friend who asked out an attractive woman. She turned him down. He told himself that no one will ever go out with him again. This ANT prevented him from asking out anyone else for over nine months.

Guilt beatings -- being overrun by thoughts of "I should have done... I'm bad because.... I must do better at... I have to..."). Guilt is powerful at making us feel bad. It is a lousy motivator of behavior.

You do not have to believe every thought that goes through your head. It's important to think about your thoughts to see if they help you or they hurt you. Unfortunately, if you never challenge your thoughts you just "believe them" as if they were true. ANTs can take over and infest your brain. Develop an internal anteater to hunt down and devour the negative thoughts that are ruining your life.

...It's a lot easier to say "stop worrying" than it is to do it. I encourage you to engage in the process of taking control of your thoughts and health, you'll be glad you did.

"Brain In The News" is offered as a free service to educate people on how the brain relates to our behavior. You can subscribe for free at www.amenclinic.com

Exercises of Positive Psychology: *Positive Psychology* is the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/

Shawn Achor on PBS television discusses positive psychology:

www.ted.com/speakers/shawn_achor.html, <http://goodthinkinc.com/speakers/shawn-achor/>

Positive Psychology is training the brain to consciously practice positive habits. The brain then connects the dots internally and makes an automatic pattern. Our mind can only think one thought at a given moment. If the thought happens to be positive, where is the possibility of arising a negative thought? With a positive thought, happiness is experienced, and all learning centers in the brain open up.

There are five exercises of training the brain to be happy: These exercises need to be practiced for twenty-one days consciously. That creates a pattern in the brain to function automatically.

1. Train the brain to be grateful about three things per day. They may be different.
2. Write in a journal for five minutes in minute detail about positive activities performed in the last day. Reflecting every few hours for half a minute on how the day has passed keeps track of where our mind has gone and happy events of the day.
3. Meditation – In Chapter 7, I have described age-old techniques for tranquility in detail. Practicing some of the techniques even fifteen minutes twice a day will yield tremendous improvement. It brings focus on the task at hand and relieves stress caused by multi-tasking.
4. Doing random acts of kindness; e.g. thanking people sincerely for some good thing/news received in the e-mail. This raises the level of social support.
5. Exercise – This has been described in the first half of this chapter.

