Still Feeling “Burned Out”?

In my April newsletter, I talked about the adverse health effects of elevated cortisol levels in the body. For many students and faculty members, April and May are very stressful months. I gave several tips to help in these stressful times and in general. One tip was the Quick Coherence HeartMath technique. I encourage you to practice this technique during the times you don’t need it just so you get the hang of this technique and when stress arises, you will remember more quickly to use it.

This month I would like to focus on another approach to help with stress or the “burned out” feeling associated with stress. This approach takes more time and preparation but it is a great supplement to use in addition to the Quick Coherence Technique and any other techniques you may have in your toolbox.

When I have been on the go at speeds the police would give tickets for, my body tells me by feeling “rundown” and fatigued and/or being unmotivated to do regular daily chores. I then realize that I have not taken the time to SLOW DOWN. It is easy to get caught up in our fast paced lives. But it is extremely important to have procedures, techniques, and ways to help ground you and return to a state of balance and well-being. One of my go-to techniques is restorative yoga/restorative poses. Restorative yoga/poses do wonders for me. Sometimes all it takes is 20 minutes to make a huge difference in energy levels, mood and attitude.

“By letting go it all gets done.”
~ Lao Tzu

What is Restorative Yoga?

Well, it’s in the name. It is a type of hatha yoga/hatha poses that help to restore health, strength, and a feeling of well-being. This style of yoga frequently relies on the use of props and the poses are held for long periods of time (3 to 5 minutes) which soothes the nervous system.

Benefits of Restorative Yoga/Poses

Because these yoga poses are slow and held for long durations, restorative yoga offers a wonderful opportunity to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and it allows the body and mind to slow down and experience a more steady and natural tempo along with a deeper breathing rhythm. An immediate side-effect of slowing down and deep breathing is an overall calming effect on the nervous system causing a shift from the chronic fight-or-flight response that is damaging to our physiology and well-being to the relaxation response that heals our body down to a cellular level.

Restorative poses also encourage mindfulness. In these poses, the point isn’t to collapse onto a prop as if you are slumping into a couch. The point is to deliberately and mindfully get into the pose and be present to the softening of the body and mind. While in a pose, awareness of physical sensations, thoughts or emotions, even sounds in the environment can take on a deeper understanding.
Benefits Continued...

A key to a calmer, more peaceful nature is being aware of the stressors in your life and then managing them in an intelligent way. Restorative poses can help strengthen your awareness “muscle”.

A restorative yoga practice, or the practice of restorative poses, can make you feel safe and nurtured. Often times, our energy is depleted by our fears, anxieties and worries in life. The deeper connection of our breath, body awareness, and relaxed state when practicing restorative yoga nurtures the body, mind and soul and we feel comforted. The way the poses are set up with props has a profound effect on the feeling of safety and nurturing. The joints must be supported to induce rest and ease. This can be best achieved when the body is receiving a message of comfort, safety and support.

Every restorative pose benefits the body, mind and soul in one way or another, ultimately leading to a stronger immune system, increasing energy and mental clarity, and to bring about a sense of peace and well-being.

Examples of Restorative Poses

Here are some of my favorite restorative poses and the many benefits associated with them (every one of these poses calms the central nervous system.)

Reclining Cobbler Pose: This pose increases blood circulation in the lower abdomen, stretches the inner thighs and opens the chest and can improve the digestive system as well as help with menstruation and menopause.

Set up:
Place a bolster long ways on the mat or a few thick blankets folded in a rectangle to support the spine. Sit tall about a hand distance away from the top of the bolster or blankets with soles of the feet drawn together and knees gently opening to the sides. For more comfort, place blocks or pillows underneath the knees for extra support. If you would like you can use your strap to place around your lower back, between the knees, and around the tops of the feet for added support. The strap should be taught and buckled to the side so it is not on your feet or digging in your hip. Please keep the strap in place around your lower back. Slowly start to recline and lower onto your elbows for support, and then lower your back onto the bolster or blanket. Place your arms on either side of the body with your palms facing the sky. Keep the soles of the feet together, tuck your chin towards your chest which will help to lengthen your spine, and if needed for neck support you can place a blanket or a thin pillow underneath the head. Enjoy this resting posture for about 5 minutes and remember to breathe. Feel free to place an eye pillow or towel over your eyes as you rest deep into the posture.

Supported Child’s Pose with a Twist: This pose offers a gentle internal organ massage (twisting action), can improve the digestive system, it quiets the mind and reduces tension in posterior muscles of back, lateral, and neck muscles.

Set up:
Place a bolster or several rectangular folded blankets on the floor. Prop up one side of the bolster or blankets on one or two blocks so it is sloped. Sit down folding the legs with your left leg on top of your right leg. Place a folded blanket...
Examples Continued....

between your knees in order to avoid compression of your hips. Sit up close to the bolster so that it vertically intersects your right hip. While your torso is still upright, twist your lower left waist to the right. Descend straight down over the bolster. Turn your head to the left and rest it so that the right side of your head is touching the bolster if it is comfortable. Enjoy this gentle twisting posture for about 3 minutes on each side and remember to breathe deeply.

Supported Child’s Pose: This pose creates a counter pressure on the abdomen and it relieves tension and stretches the lower back. All the physiological ramifications of stress are reduced and fatigue is diminished. It brings about a sense of security and a feeling of support & letting go.

Set up:
Vertically place a bolster or several rectangular folded up blankets on the floor. Prop up one side of the bolster or blankets on one or two blocks so it is sloped. Begin on your knees with big toes touching together. Open your knees wider than hip width apart so the bolster or blankets are between the legs. Rest your buttocks on your heels (if needed use a blanket between your buttocks and calf muscles for knee support and rolled up towel or blanket under your ankles for ankle support). Inhale looking forward and opening the chest, Exhale keeping your buttocks on your heels and walk your hands forward, hinging from the hips and rest your chest and upper body on the bolster. Turn your head to the right for 3 minutes, remembering to breathe, and then turn your head to the left for 3 minutes, remembering to breathe. To release, inhale looking forward and exhale walking the hands back by your side and sitting upright.

Legs Up the Wall: This pose eases muscle tension, relieves fatigue and stress, and is good for insomnia. It helps with lower back pain, and relieves swollen ankles and varicose veins. By putting your feet in a vertical position, the lymphatic system will be stimulated. This is a cooling posture which lowers the blood pressure as well.

Set up:
Move your yoga mat to the wall or lay a folded blanket long enough to support your spine (this adds some cushion). Place a folded blanket against the wall. Sit with your right hip to the wall. Pivot around and lie down on the mat or blanket and raise your legs up the wall ensuring the folded blanket is underneath your pelvis. Depending on the flexibility of your hamstrings, your buttocks can either be touching the wall or several inches away. Comfort is the goal here! Keep your feet and heels together, with the feet flexed back and the legs active (a strap can be placed around the thighs to help keep the legs together). Allow your arms to lay by your sides with the palms facing up or rest your hands on your tummy. Support your neck/head with a blanket. Melt your shoulders down to the earth, and tilt your chin towards your chest to lengthen the spine. Close your eyes and, if
Examples Continued....

you like, place an eye pillow or towel gently over your eyes. Focus on your breath with a deep inhale and nourishing exhale. Hold the pose for 5 to 10 minutes. To release the pose, tuck your knees down towards your chest and slowly roll to your right hand side, your left hand can help push you to a seated position. 

*Remember, these poses aren’t about getting the biggest stretch. They are about letting go and finding contentment.*

These props can be purchased at any yoga store or online store such as Yoga Accessories, Hugger Mugger, Gaiam or Amazon.

If you have any questions or can’t quite figure out how to set up a pose, please email or call me or stop by my office.

For a video tutorial of how to set up in each of these poses, please [click here](#).

Spring Time Salad

In the past 3 weeks, I have made this salad at least once every week (sometimes more often) since I purchased a small basil plant at John Brooks. There are SO many ways to make this salad. When I want a quick snack or meal, this is the way I prepare it.

**Caprese Salad with Arugula**

**Ingredients (I don’t usually measure)**

- 5 ripe tomatoes OR 3 cups cherry tomatoes
- 5 thick slices of mozzarella cheese
- 6 to 10 basil leaves (depending on size of leaf)
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil (or more)
- ¼ to 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar (or more)
- 2 – 3 handfuls of arugula
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cut the tomatoes into thick slices (I then cut into halves) or half the cherry tomatoes. Do the same with the mozzarella and place in a large bowl. Chiffonade the basil (I like to be fancy) or cut into pieces. Add to the bowl. Drizzle olive oil and balsamic vinegar over tomatoes, cheese and basil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Place the arugula in a salad bowl then spoon the caprese salad over it. Grab a fork and enjoy!