

Transforming Stress

The HeartMath® Solution for Relieving Worry, Fatigue and Tension by
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Chapter 8

The Power to Shift Attitude

We've talked about how important it is for your health and peak performance to have positive feelings and attitudes running through your system during your day. So how do you learn the skill of quick attitude shifts?

At times, it's clear when a person needs to make an attitude adjustment. Perhaps you've heard friends telling each other; "Girl, you need an attitude adjustment" when one is negative for too long, or teenagers talking in the school hallway saying, "You've got an attitude problem." Maybe you have friends who you know aren't going to see any way out of their problems until they change their attitude.

But changing an attitude can feel like an uphill struggle or a do-good attempt at positive thinking with no juice behind it. You need power to change negative momentum and make attitude shifts that you *feel* are real. So what can you do?

There are times you'll need extra power to shift a negative attitude and make it stick. You can add that power with a HeartMath tool called Attitude Breathing. Attitude Breathing powers you up by getting more of your physiological systems in sync. It harnesses the power of your gut as well as your heart to take the fire out of negative emotions so they have less hold on you. With Attitude Breathing, you can change those adrenal stress hormones more quickly and find your way back faster to an attitude of calm and balance.

Attitude Breathing®

Attitude Breathing is a tool that helps you synchronize the nervous system activity in your entire body. By using this tool regularly, you gradually build the power to make attitude shifts that last. Attitude Breathing will restructure your emotions and re-pattern your neural circuitry and hormonal responses so you can change long-standing unproductive attitudes, including those you are not even consciously aware of.

Many people have grumbles and gripes running as background noise behind their thoughts. This makes the day look bleak, like a black-and-white movie, instead of colorful, vibrant, and filled with rich texture. Attitude Breathing will help you clear out these old gripes and negative undercurrents so you can minimize the stress hormones running through your system and gain access to the feel-good hormones that keep you feeling vibrant.

- *Attitude Breathing Tool*

1. Focus on the heart as you breathe in (as you learned to do in the Quick Coherence technique). As you breathe out, focus on your solar plexus.
2. Practice breathing in through the heart and out through the solar plexus for thirty seconds or longer to help anchor your energy and attention there. Next, select a positive feeling or attitude (try appreciation, for example) to breathe in through the heart and out through the solar plexus for another thirty seconds (or longer).

3. Once you feel the appreciation, lock in the *feeling* of that positive attitude. Now, as you breathe, visualize building and storing the positive energy that the feeling of appreciation gives you. Practice breathing that appreciation for a few minutes.
4. Select attitudes to breathe that will help offset the negative emotion or imbalance of the situation you are in. Breathe deeply, with the intent of shifting to the feeling of that attitude. You can breathe two attitudes, if you'd like. For example, you can breathe in an attitude of balance and breathe out an attitude of forgiveness, or you can breathe in an attitude of love and breathe out an attitude of compassion.

Using Attitude Breathing

Practice different attitudes you want to develop. You can tell yourself, "Breathe courage," "Breathe ease," "Breathe forgiveness," "Breathe neutral," or whatever attitude you need. Even if you can't *feel* the attitude shift at first, making a genuine and earnest effort to shift will at least help you get to a neutral state. In neutral, you have more objectivity and you save energy.

Attitude Breathing is especially handy during highly charged situations. The tool combines the power of the heart and gut to enable you to shift emotion and physiology right in the middle of a strong reaction. The heart is the most powerful rhythmic oscillator in the body, so it pulls the body's other rhythms into synchronization with its own. Your power to make attitude adjustments will build fast as you use Attitude Breathing in the middle of a reaction or disagreement.

When you first try Attitude Breathing in a charged situation, it can feel like you're going against the grain or against what you know about the situation. You may have to apply earnest effort against resistance. During strong reactions, you may need to breathe the new attitude earnestly for two or three minutes before your nerves quiet down and you experience a shift. Do it for the sake of creating coherence. Do it for yourself. Have a genuine "I mean business" attitude to really move those emotions into a more coherent state and shift your physiology.

- Use your notebook to write down unproductive attitudes you know you have and more positive attitudes you wish you had. Now think of that nemesis in your life or that person who gets your goat or has been a problem for you. Consider what attitudes might help you stay in more coherence when you're around that person. Pick one or two and use them in Attitude Breathing.

Simply focus in the area of your heart while breathing those feelings or attitudes. Try attitudes opposite from what you've been feeling—for example, love and appreciation if you've been feeling animosity and resentment. Breathe the feelings of love and appreciation in through the heart as best you can, then breathe them out through the solar plexus area. Imagine love and appreciation flowing in and out with your breath until you find an easy rhythm with it. Don't worry about whether you are doing it right. Just look for the rhythm. Practice this genuinely and earnestly for thirty seconds or longer. Then stop and note what you perceive and feel. The shift might be subtle, but you will probably be more balanced about the situation.

Attitude Breathing in Daily Life

It's fun to experiment with different attitudes. You will develop new awareness of what each attitude feels like and what it can do for you. Practice Attitude Breathing until you remember to do it automatically when you feel irritated, frustrated, angry, anxious, or fearful. These emotions

speed up the aging process. This tool is a countermeasure against unhappiness and aging.

Use Attitude Breathing several times during the day — even when nothing is disturbing you — in order to build up a storage bank of positive emotional energy. When you're feeling great, breathe joy or appreciation and store that positive energy. The advantage of stored positive energy is that it helps lift you above frustrations, anxieties, and gridlocks in day-to-day life that would otherwise drain you. It gives you a chance to sort out challenges without them taking you down. When these stressors still take you off guard, reboot your heart power by taking a moment to go back to Attitude Breathing.

Attitude Breathing works on the same principle as putting money in the bank. It's handy in times of need. The idea is to build a cushion or reserve you can draw on when negative situations start to sap your energy. You can breathe any attitude that's appropriate for the situation. For example, when you find yourself reacting to a stressful situation, try breathing the attitude of emotional calm. This is important because on the other side of calm are the energetic storms that emotionally drain your system. Remembering to practice Attitude Breathing in the midst of stress often stops the draining process and especially helps you replenish energy after you're already drained. With practice, Attitude Breathing stops payment on energy drains before stress issues pull you into their negative loops and exhaust your emotional accounts.

Most energy drains happen when you get sucked into others' downward spirals. When your positive-attitude energy is drained, it leaves you operating on nerve energy without emotional salve, which increases the stress in your physical system. Earnest practice of Attitude Breathing can change this. But remember, it's important to do Attitude Breathing from your genuine heart, because if you do it just from the mind — without the heart — you won't draw enough power to shift. Positive thinking alone is not enough to shift attitudes highly charged with emotion. Adding heart power is the missing factor, because it puts spirit behind intent.

Attitude Breathing can help you plan ahead for situations you expect will be stressful and leave you more prepared to handle the unexpected. Try breathing attitudes of taking significance out, non-judgment, balance, emotional calm, alignment, compassion, forgiveness, and other attitudes that instill emotional strength. Breathing these attitudes stores positive energy to be used when you need it.

Let's say tomorrow you're going to a meeting, and you know that some of the items on the agenda are going to bring up stress and frustration. With Attitude Breathing, you can start today and power up enough emotional strength to breeze through the meeting without becoming another victim of the storm. In this type of situation, you can breathe the attitude of balance and emotional calm. Of course, these attitudes are not just for meetings. They can prepare you for any encounters with people, issues, or situations that you already know are loaded with potential for stress.

Remember, it's not so much *situations* that drain you. It's the amount of repetitive negative thought and *emotional significance* you assign to those situations that depletes energy. Practice taking significance out of anything. You can do that by breathing the attitude of taking significance out. This is one of the most important attitudes that you can breathe. Attitude Breathing to take significance out strengthens your power to make effective changes in your day-to-day world and in your life in general.

Emotional preparation before any predictable stressful scenario can save tons of energy in a day, and even more over the course of a week or longer. The energy you save improves your health, stockpiles happiness, and slows down the emotional aging process. This is something we've proved in the HeartMath labs. Emotional drains accelerate aging and sap vitality. Attitude Breathing is a serious and effective tool for preventing that.

Learn to practice Attitude Breathing while you're taking a walk, exercising, driving, walking to and from the office — anywhere. Post reminders to do it on your bathroom mirror or computer, PDA, or cell phone. Practicing will store strength and flex in your emotional nature. The energy saved is internalized and used by your body for healing old patterns in your mental, emotional, and physical self. It moves old emotional patterns out and replaces them with positive

strength patterns that become hardwired in your system as you practice.

- One of the most effective times to practice Attitude Breathing is during the first thirty minutes after you wake up in the morning. Play an Attitude Breathing game. Start Attitude Breathing as soon as you get out of bed, and see how long you can continue to do it. Breathe appreciation or balance, for example, while you're taking a shower, getting dressed, making breakfast, getting the kids off to school, and so forth. Especially breathe balance and emotional calm when things are running late or there are traffic gridlocks while you're driving to work. Practice the tool casually as you go about your business. When you get distracted, just remember to go back and practice Attitude Breathing instead of processing all the negative stuff that can come up in the morning. Make it into a fun game, and it will set a different tone for your day. Our research at HeartMath has shown that this tool alone helps to provide an emotional cushion through daily stressors. It helps to prevent your emotions from becoming frayed and causing you to then have to operate on nerve energy – producing drain.

When you don't want to practice, when you'd rather hold on to a reaction or pout, or when a negative reaction "owns" you, go against the grain of habit and generate an attitude shift. Each time you do this, you'll progress in transforming your nervous system and hormonal responses.

Ann, an elementary school teacher, was reassigned to a junior high class due to a teacher shortage. She found the kids testy and daunting. Ann says, "Each morning I'd wake with a sense of dread, not wanting to face the day. And once I woke up, it was hard to shut my mind off. I would worry, blame myself for my shortcomings, or be thinking of how I could do things better. When I faced the first class, I was still fighting the anxiety, not knowing what back talk I was going to get from these kids today. After I learned the heart-solar plexus breathing, I used it each morning. I did it while getting dressed and ready for the day, in spite of the fact that anxiety was causing my solar plexus to churn and my mind was racing. I also did it in spite of the fact that I could not feel my heart. I just kept telling myself to breathe ease and appreciation for the kids I liked. By the time I sat down for my morning coffee, I could feel a shift. Sometimes it would be to a more calm and centered place. At other times, a warm feeling of love would flood into my heart, or a sense of peace. No matter how agitated I felt upon rising, by really going for the Attitude Breathing, by the time I faced my students, the sense of anxiety and dread had eased and I felt ready to face the day. I also have found it valuable to remind myself to do Attitude Breathing during the day, and it's helped me maintain inner security and balance. It has not been an easy teaching year, but without the Attitude Breathing tool, I can't imagine what this year would have been like."

Attitude Breathing on the Job

At work, people sometimes communicate poorly, and feelings can get hurt. Once emotions are bruised, people easily slip into judgmental reactions, which are downshifts toward negativity and incoherence. If you lose a lot of energy when your feelings get hurt, your energetic field turns negative, and you are likely to pass that negativity on to others.

Through genuine heart effort, you can interrupt the cycle with Attitude Breathing. Shifting to a positive attitude helps you cut your losses and release the accumulated stress. Don't underestimate what you can do when your heart is behind the doing.

Attitude Breathing helps keep emotional energy grounded in highly stressful job situations.

Emergency workers learn to do it (often unconsciously) because they must. They have to shift out of emotional reactions quickly, or the stress would block their ability to make fast, effective, lifesaving decisions and lead to burnout. They develop the capacity to focus their energies in the heart and solar plexus to balance their reactions to life-and-death situations.

Solano, an ER assistant, told us that when he first learned Attitude Breathing at a HeartMath training at his hospital, he realized it's what he does automatically when a patient is brought into the trauma room. Solano says, "I was so glad to see there's a scientific reason behind what I was doing and why it works for me. I didn't even know that's what I was doing until I did the Attitude Breathing in the workshop. I always breathe in care and compassion through my heart to get myself right and then anchor that feeling in my solar plexus to stay grounded and not overreact to the situation. I still react some, but it takes the extra emotion out. It keeps me centered to see how best to treat the injury – and the person, too."

Other Important Times to Use Attitude Breathing

Here are some other ways you can use Attitude Breathing:

When you can't sleep because your thoughts are racing. Use Attitude Breathing for five minutes to clear the slate.

When you wake up feeling anxious about your day. Use Attitude Breathing to restart your day and reboot your system. Make a commitment in your heart to start each day fresh.

When fear projections surface about what might happen today or tomorrow. Use Attitude Breathing for a few minutes to center yourself and prepare for whatever might happen next. It could be better than you think.

When you find yourself ruminating with a negative attitude. Tell yourself, "No, stop, don't go there. I've been there, done that, and I know where it will lead." Use Attitude Breathing with the intent of restructuring that pattern and stopping the energy drain.

When traumatic memories resurface. Use Attitude Breathing for a few moments to interrupt the neural pattern. Regular practice of Quick Coherence®, Heart Lock-In®, and Attitude Breathing will lessen the impact of traumatic memories and, over time, help re-pattern the neural imprint. Many people with post-traumatic stress disorder report that their attacks become fewer and less severe when they practice these HeartMath tools alone or as an adjunct to other therapies.

Don't Postpone Positive Change

It's easy to put off looking at certain emotions or attitudes in yourself, but putting it off only makes other aspects of your life worse. If you put it off because you think you don't have any feelings, or because you are afraid it won't help you get what you want, you are denying what your heart knows really needs to be addressed.

When you defer emotional responsibilities, such as shifting negative attitudes, it's like accumulating credit card debt that you'll have to pay later. On an energy level, it really does work this way. Your negative attitude drains you emotionally, and you go about your business with grumbles, gripes, and fatigue going on underneath. It's all you can do to keep up with paying the interest on what you're deferring. You can't get ahead because you're always behind. Every time you get one thing clear, two more problems to gripe about pop up. Eventually the debt grows to the point that it's all you can do to make the minimum payment each month.

Building power to make attitude adjustments reverses your emotional debt. Interest compounds in your favor, like it does in a savings account. What you appreciate appreciates in value, just as a savings account appreciates in value.

Instead of wasting your energy in deferred feelings, use that same energy to make attitude shifts. Be glad to know *whatever* you are feeling, because now you have tools and techniques to redirect your energy wisely. As you use your energetic heart intent to generate attitude shifts in yourself, you'll change your internal pharmacy (your hormones and biochemistry) and experience more buoyancy, freedom, and a sense of youthful energy. This is an anti-aging formula.

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