

## **Countering Stage Fright**

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Hello students, I am here to discuss the systematic desensitization as countering stage fright. In the previous lecture also, I highlighted the background of systematic desensitization of countering stage fright. And why this is so important to know is because this gives a kind of relaxation from which a person may get confidence to come out of the imagined fear. As I was discussing hierarchy of fear with the exposure of fear, so let us discuss today exposure to fears. So, this is the third stage of therapy. When the doctor assigns tasks to help the patients expose themselves to the fears, it's starting from the less fearful ones.

In vitro or in vivo are the two ways of exposure to fear techniques. In an in vitro exposure, the patient imagines their fear and therapists encourage them to face these fears. With the in vivo exposure, the patient may face their fear in reality. There is another exposure method called virtual reality exposure therapy.

And this therapy puts the patient in a computer-generated environment that mimics real life or that creates the imagined real life situation. And this helps both the therapist and the patient work through the fears in a controlled atmosphere. Now we should know the limitations of this systematic desensitization therapy. Is there any limitations? Well, there are some limitations of this therapy. What are those limitations? And as a person of performance anxiety, we should know about it.

Because this therapy, systematic desensitization, is a very good therapy. So, what are the limitations? The effectiveness of in vitro therapy depends upon the patient's ability to imagine the situations, objects, or people that make them anxious. If the patient is incapable to imagine properly, the method can fail. The therapy puts emphasis on handling the symptoms and not the issue's root causes. Systematic desensitization therapy is a slow process and sometimes the absence of triggers during the sessions can provoke the patient to abandon the therapy, quit the therapy.

So systematic desensitization usually starts with imagining yourself in a progression of fearful situations and then using relaxation strategies that compete with anxiety. Once you, as the sufferer, can successfully manage your anxiety while imagining fearful events, you can use the technique in real-life situations too. You must learn to relax. Before you can begin gradually exposing yourself to your feared situations, you must first learn and practice some relaxation techniques. This is a very important point.

What are those techniques? Some techniques commonly used in relaxation training include, you know, deep breathing. When people are anxious, they tend to take rapid shallow breaths that come directly from the chest. And this type of breathing is called thoracic. So when you are feeling anxious, you may not even be aware that you are breathing this way. Chest breathing disturbs the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the body, resulting in increased heart rate, dizziness, muscle tension, and other physical sensations.

This may signal your body to produce stress, a response that contributes to anxiety and panic attacks. Now if we talk of breathing exercises, see it is the best part of yoga system. Nine breathing exercises are there to relieve anxiety. Breathing is necessity of life that usually occurs without much thought because our life, our existence depends on breathing. When you breathe in, blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide.

Carbon dioxide is a waste product that is carried back through your body and exhaled. Improper breathing can upset the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange and contribute to anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, and other physical and emotional disturbances. There are different ways of breathing, like the alternate nostril breathing. Alternate nostril breathing, that is nadi shodhana, involves blocking off one nostril at a time as you breathe through the other, alternating between nostrils in a regular pattern. It is best to practice this type of anxiety relieving breathing in a seated position in order to maintain your posture.

Now, what is the posture? Appropriate- position your right hand by bending your pointer and middle fingers into your palm, leaving your thumb, ring finger, and pinky extended. This is known as Vishnu Mudra in yoga. Close your eyes or softly gaze downward. Inhale and exhale, to begin. Close off your right nostril with your thumb.

Inhale through left nostril. Close off your left nostril with your ring finger. Open and exhale through your right nostril. Inhale through your right nostril. Close off your right nostril with your thumb.

Open and exhale through your left nostril. Inhale through your left nostril. These are the

patterns to be relaxed, and relaxed in a way to generate oxygen in your body to give you energy and positivity. So breathing exercise with a pattern is very, very important. Work up to 10 rounds of this breathing pattern.

If you begin to feel lightheaded, take a breath by releasing both nostrils and breathing normally. Second is belly breathing. According to the American Institute of Stress, 20 to 30 minutes of belly breathing, also known as abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing, each day can reduce stress and anxiety. Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit or lie down. For example, try sitting in a chair, sitting cross-legged or lying on your back with a small pillow under your head and another under your knees.

Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your belly below the ribcage. Allow your belly to relax without forcing it inward by squeezing or clenching your muscles. Breathe in slowly through your nose. The air should move into your nose and downward so that you feel your stomach rise with your other hand and fall inward toward your spine. Exhale slowly through slightly pursed lips.

Take note of the hand on your chest which should remain relatively still. Although the sequence frequency will vary according to your health because individual variations are there, most people begin by doing the exercise three times and working up to five to ten minutes, one to four times a day. Then comes box breathing, also known as four-squared breathing. Box breathing is very simple to learn and practice. In fact, if you have ever noticed yourself inhaling and exhaling to the rhythm of a song, you are already familiar with the type of paced breathing.

So it goes like this. Exhale to a count of four. One, two, three, four. You exercise in your mind or count. Hold your lungs empty for a four count.

Inhale to a count of four. Hold the air in your lungs for a count of four. Exhale and begin the pattern anew. 4, 7, 8 breathing style. The 4, 7, 8 breathing exercise, also called the relaxing breathe, acts as a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. At first it is best to perform the exercise seated with your back straight.

So, once you become more familiar with this breathing exercise, however, you can perform it while lying in bed. Place and keep the tip of your tongue against the wrist of tissue. Define your upper front teeth for the duration of the exercise. Completely exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.

Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale completely through your mouth making a

whoosh sound to a count of eight. Then comes lion's breath. Lion's breath or Simhasana in Sanskrit, during which you stick out at your tongue and roar like a lion is another helpful deep breathing practice. It can help to relax the muscles in your face and jaw, alleviate stress and improve cardiovascular function.

So although using the term mental health, the mind body connection and physical health implies. These are two distinct, separate aspects to wellness. The recent study highlights how they can be deeply interconnected. In addition to cardiovascular issues, conditions like depression and anxiety are often associated with, like chronic pain, especially lower back pain, headaches. Digestive issues like IBS, vision problems, reduced appetite or increased craving for food, slow thinking, speaking or body movements, overall aches and pain.

So, in terms of emotional or mental effects. The American Psychiatric Association defines depression symptoms as including low mood, irritability, sadness, decreased interest or pleasure in daily activities, decreased motivation, insomnia or hypersomnia. So if you find yourself struggling, with emotional and mental health challenges and experiencing signs and depression which may manifest as physical symptoms like fatigue, chronic pain, headaches, stomach pain, try to consult the primary care physician, your primary care physician or another healthcare provider for appropriate referrals. You may be able to do telehealth sessions with a therapist or counselor even as a new patient. But then, this needs to be addressed because if you address the issue well on time, you can be a good artist.

This mindfulness breathing is also very important, that is why mind-body connection, that is a fact. Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on your breathing and bringing your attention to the present without allowing your mind to drift to the past or future. Engaging in mindfulness breathing exercises serves the same purpose, which can help ease your anxiety. So mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice that teaches you to slow down racing thoughts, let go of negativity and calm both your mind and body. It combines meditation with the practice of mindfulness, which can be defined as a mental state that involves being fully focused on the now.

So, you can acknowledge and accept your thoughts, feelings, sensation, without judgment. Techniques can vary, but in general mindfulness meditation involves deep breathing and awareness of body and mind. Practicing mindfulness meditation doesn't require props or preparation. No need for candles, essential oils, or mantras unless you enjoy them. To get started, all you need is a comfortable place to sit.

Three to five minutes of free time and a judgment-free mindset. So practice mindfulness

meditation. Learning mindfulness meditation is straightforward enough to practice on your own, but a teacher or program can also help you to get started, particularly if you are practicing meditation for specific health reasons. You must notice your thought. So the goal is not to stop your thoughts, but to get more comfortable becoming the witness to the thoughts.

When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them. Simply note them. Remain calm and use your breathing as an anchor. Imagine your thoughts as clouds passing by. Watch them float by as they shift and change.

Repeat this as often as you need to while you are meditating. You must give yourself a break. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, whether with worry, fear, anxiety or hope, observe where your mind went without judgment and just return to your breathing. Do not be hard on yourself if this happens. The practice of returning to your breath and refocusing on the present is the practice of mindfulness.

So, what are the impacts of mindfulness meditation? Regular practice of mindfulness meditation has benefits for your physical as well as your mental health. These are some of the, you know, results reducing stress. Mindfulness-based stress reduction, MBSR, a standardized therapeutic approach to mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce symptoms of stress in healthy individuals. The practice has also been found to be beneficial for a number of mental and physical disorders, including anxiety, depression, and chronic pain.

It also helps to lower heart rate. Heart disease is one of the top causes of death throughout the world and research suggests that mindfulness may be beneficial for your heart. In one study, participants either enrolled in an online mindfulness meditation program or were added to a wait list for traditional treatment for heart disease. So, those who participated in mindfulness meditation had significantly lower heart rates and performed better on a test of cardiovascular capacity. Research also suggest that mindfulness practices may improve your body's resistance to illness. One study compared the impact of both mindfulness and exercise on immune function.

They found that people who had taken part in an 8 week mindfulness course had greater gains in immune function than those in the exercise group. Well, better sleep is also the possible come out. Studies have also shown that practicing mindfulness meditation might improve sleep and even be useful for treating certain sleep disturbances. One 2019 study found that mindfulness meditation significantly improved sleep quality and also results in self-improvement. We are all works in progress and it takes effort and dedication to grow and evolve in a positive direction.

Fortunately, there is never a bad time to set new goals for yourself and it's never too late to pick up a habit that can improve your well-being for the rest of your life. Whether you are dealing with stress, working through relationship struggles, or simply trying to change your life in small ways, there are many strategies available to help you be the best version of yourself. So systematic desensitization, consisting of certain important steps like identifying and ranking the anxiety stimulus. The individual identifies the reason for anxiety and ranks them from low to high on the scale 1 to 10.

Learn relaxation techniques. He, she learns meditation and deep breathing to help cope with fear. Exposure to the anxiety stimulus- the individual is exposed to the anxiety stimulus in the increasing order of hierarchy from low to high and taught to relax at each stage. At each stage, as they relax, the next higher level of stimulus producing anxiety is presented. And this ensures that anxiety is reduced at each stage and the individual is able to cope with their fear.

You need to identify the rank of anxiety stimulus. Start by identifying the objects or situations associated with public speaking that make you afraid, that is fearful. Try to rank them. Like, for example, hierarchy was speaking in front of family, least scary. Speaking in front of friends, the same.

Speaking in front of classmates or colleagues, yes, scary. Speaking in front of an unknown audience, most scary. So many patients benefit from having a written rational reason or letter. The going might get tough and the patient will letter weep for having bailed out. Metaphors help patients to understand the process. Walking through exposure hierarchies is like earning grades at a school or mastering a video game level.

It helps to normalize the anxiety, reminding patients that most fears are based in evolutionary mechanism. And here again metaphors can help. It is like big, you get it, but little, you do not. Hierarchy with fewer than 15 to 20 items often do not provide enough exposure.

2 to 3 items for each of the 10 levels is ideal. A schedule self-exposure time in advance, ideally daily. Avoid self-exposure while and holidays. Prepare the patient for inevitability of revisions. Some contingencies can't be predicted, like the baby garter snake was jumpy.

Get back on the horse quickly. Advise the patient to continue each self-exposure until anxiety drops by least 50%. If it does not, it is technically sensitization rather than desensitization and that is not the end of the world, but it is clearly not preferred. Here, I

want to conclude my discussion on systematized desensitization countering stage fright because there are many more to discuss under this umbrella term to counter the stage fear or stage fright. So I would like to wrap up the discussion here and just say that meet me again in the next lecture with the same topic, but with a new discussion which will tell you more ways to desensitize your fear, your performance anxiety, your phobia. Till then bye, see you in the next meeting. Thank you.