



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 040 – The Role of Stress and the Importance of Breath
with Victor Briere, A.D.
May 26, 2021

00:05

Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello and welcome to Episode 40. Thank you so much for joining me for the shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today I'm joined, once again, by Victor Briere, an Ayurvedic doctor who shares his thoughts on the impact of stress. My original question was about practices to help manage stress, but Victor took the conversation in a refreshing direction. He reminds us of the important role that stress plays in our lives and how intentional breathing is the healthiest practice you can incorporate into your days.

Victor has also offered to give any listener of this podcast a free abdominal breathing instruction if you email him and mention this podcast. I'll include links to his website and his email address in the show notes.



And now on to the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

01:30 Kathy

So once again, I'm joined by Ayurvedic doctor Victor Briere. Welcome back, Dr. Victor.

01:38 Victor

Thank you. Thank you for having me again.

01:40 Kathy

In our last conversation, we talked about the impact fear has on the body. And in a similar vein, our listeners are very aware of the impact that stress has on their lives. A lot of the folks that listen try to incorporate practices to help them manage through stressful times. So could you share some actionable small steps that our listeners can take to not only minimize stress, but to help optimize their health and well-being?

02:11 Victor

Yeah, definitely. I mean, there's so much we can do so. Have no fear... we're talking about fear.

First, I want to say, your body is more than capable of handling stress. Actually, a certain amount of stress is healthy and necessary for your body. Your body's always seeking homeostasis and equilibrium. And it has to combat a lot of environmental stresses to do that, constantly. You walk outside and if it's colder than it was inside, I know you guys are just coming out of winter on the East Coast, then your body has to make all sorts of adjustments to deal with that. That stress your body has to undergo, but that's okay. Your body's meant to handle that.



Stress becomes a problem when it becomes overwhelming or our body gets so weak that our threshold to handle stress becomes so low that we can't and then something malfunctions or breaks, that's when it's a problem. That's the state we need to avoid.

So the idea isn't let's get rid of stress. If you think about it physiologically, that's really not even possible. What you want to say is I need to increase my stress resilience. And that is where you can really do a lot of work.

So all sorts of things can cause stress. But basically, in a nutshell, it's a perceived threat. That's what causes stress. So it doesn't have to be real, just perceived.

So let's say, in my past when I was a little boy, my dad yelled at me all the time really loud at the top of his lungs. And of course, as a little boy, I'm like, Oh, no, I'm threatened. And so my body goes into a defensive state, naturally. Well, let's say that happened 500 times, you know, that was just my life.

So now I'm in my late 20s and I don't live with my dad anymore, but now I have a male boss and he's got a temper. And he comes and says, "Victor!" And I hear that voice and my body just goes, "Oh!" because my body remembers my past. My nervous system carries that memory. So I automatically engage the beginnings of my defense mechanism.

That auto word is important because that's my autonomic nervous system acting. Now, I don't have direct control over my autonomic nervous system, so I can't sit there and think, well, just don't stress out. It's not going to work. I actually have to tell my body, I have to communicate to my body that there's no real threat present, that I'm okay.



What do I do to do that? That's where we can work.

Number one, if there's only one thing that a person listens to - listen to this: breath, breathing. That's number one. Forget a tumeric supplement. And I'm an Ayurvedic guy. So I love tumeric, forget the turmeric supplement, okay? Breathe. If your diaphragm is all locked up and tight, you can take all the tumeric in the world and it's not going to do anything for you. Breathe.

There is a very specific way of breathing and that's abdominal breathing, where you fully engage the movement of the diaphragm. And, you know, please seriously do it, reach out to me, I'll give you a free 15 minute breath coach session because it's that important. If the whole world needs to breathe. Or go to your closest real yoga teacher, not the 24 Hour Fitness yoga, but a real yoga studio with a real yoga teacher and learn how to breathe properly.

Because why? The breath is something that we can control consciously and is controlled by our autonomic nervous system. So it's the link between those two nervous systems. So we can use it to communicate to our autonomic nervous system. Tightness means fear and stress. Open expansiveness means relax, rejuvenate, digest. It's a two way street.

06:36

You'll notice that when you relax, what's the first thing a person does when they relax? [takes a deep, audible breath] Okay, there you go. So just do that in reverse. And now let's get it going to take more than one breath. It's gonna take 10 minutes, 15 minutes, but the more you practice, the better you get at it, the better your vagal tone gets. The vagus nerve is the thing that switches us between nervous systems. And the more you



work the diaphragm, the diaphragm will actually massage the vagus nerve, which then will send a message to your heart saying, hey, reduce your heart rate, hey, lungs, don't demand so much. We're good.

And now your behaviors are going to drastically change. If you go up and your boss says "Victor!," and you're all, you know, you're going to perform a certain set of behaviors based on your contracted fear state. Whereas if you're calm, open and relaxed, you're going to carry out a whole different conversation. So that's the short version.

Of course, it gets into crazy relational nuances. And people communicate on that level. And, you know, if you start being calm, and someone wants you to be afraid, they might amplify and make it even worse. And then there's all that stuff, but that's for a different podcast.

07:47 Kathy

Excellent. Wow, that was great. And now, you know, as soon as you started talking about the breath, of course, I sat up a little bit straighter, right. Like, yep, I can feel that tension in there. Fascinating. Excellent. Great.

Well, thank you so much, again, for joining us. And I'll put links to that. And I think I'm going to contact you to learn how to breathe because I think I could use that as well!

08:09 Victor

Anytime you want.

08:11 Kathy



Thank you so much for coming. Appreciate it.

08:17 Victor

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, download the Gentle Spring Reset PDF or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!