

June 2003 issue of 'National Safety' magazine, from the National Safety Council of Australia (NSCA).

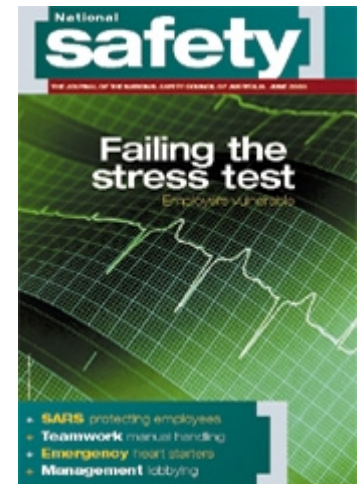
Reduce Stress in a Tick

A new system combining breathing and positive thinking techniques allows employees to calm their bodies' response to stress, literally before their eyes.

You have an angry customer on the phone, your computer has crashed and your boss is walking towards you with an enormous pile of extra work.

How does your body respond? More importantly, what are you going to do about it?

US company HeartMath®, has developed a stress management system which allows employees to see their heart rhythms displayed on a computer screen. This allows them to not only visualise the impact of stress on their bodies, but also apply techniques to settle it down. Stressed workers can link up to a computer via a finger sensor and a software program and watch the graph of their heart rhythm change from jagged to smooth in a matter of minutes.



Dallas Tye, HeartMath program director for Sydney training company Macquarie Institute, says that the system centres on recalling positive emotions.

“The heart has its own nervous system which responds very strongly to emotion, both positive and negative.

“HeartMath research shows that by breathing deeply, concentrating on the area around the heart and recalling a positive experience workers can improve the communication between the brain and the heart – offering significant health benefits, including a stronger immune system.

In addition, Tye says there are short-term benefits such as improved clarity of thought.

“When you experience a stressful situation at work, the brain sends information to the heart’s nervous system, and the body responds to that negative emotion by inhibiting the brain cortex. The result is that we are not able to think clearly. In a time of crisis, the body doesn’t want you to think, it wants you to get out of the way!”

Tye explains that although human beings are ‘wired’ this way, it may not necessarily facilitate our successful functioning in the contemporary office.

“The reality is that human beings have only had a short amount of time (in evolutionary terms) to get used to the pace of work and the volume of information to process in the modern office. The fax machine, for example, has only been around for 20 years.

“On the other hand, our in-built neurological evolutionary responses have been there for 200,000 years. And scientists tell us they now estimate that it takes more than 5000 years to change a small piece of biology,” he says.

“The HeartMath techniques allow you to consciously change the quality of the internal signal from the heart to the brain enabling individuals to maximise brain function. This enhances clarity, creativity and insight, which are the key factors determining an individual's personal performance. These techniques are therefore capable of improving personal and organisational effectiveness, adaptability, productivity and morale,” he says.

Tye says that an advantage of the HeartMath approach is that it can be used at any time or place.

“People can learn relaxation techniques – but they are often hard to apply in the middle of a stressful situation. HeartMath provides strategies which can be used in the moment, for example before that difficult meeting or prior to getting in the car.”

He cites statistics which show the improvements achieved by 1,400 participants from six global companies, sustained over six months following a one-day training session with HeartMath. They include a 41% reduction in intent to leave the job, a 25% improvement in ability to focus, a 60% reduction in anxiety and a 45% reduction in exhaustion.

The techniques have been used in many large US companies and are now being trialed in Australia.

For more information on the HeartMath approach, contact the Macquarie Institute, Tel: 02 9412 2500 or e-mail info@heartmath.com.au

Written by Paul Somerville. First published in 'National Safety', June 03. 'National Safety' is published for the National Safety Council of Australia. www.nasca.org.au