

Control your heart, control your world?

Heart-rhythm meditation can help you cope with stress

By Dann Denny, Herald-Times Staff Writer

February 8, 2005

Imagine this.

You're blissfully driving your car up Walnut Street when some knucklehead in a Camry cuts you off — forcing you to slam on your brakes.

Now here's the weird part. You react quickly and calmly.

No red-faced shouts. No single-digit gestures. Not even a nasty thought.

This wild fantasy can become a reality in your life, said Kevin Walsh, a Bloomington registered nurse who teaches a three-week course in heart-rhythm meditation.

"Heart-rhythm meditation is mindful attention to your breathing and heartbeat while sitting in quiet stillness," said Walsh, who's been certified by the Institute for Applied Meditation to teach the course. "It's a powerful tool that helps you have more impact on your surroundings than your surroundings have on you."

Walsh said that when people encounter stressful situations, their heart rates should increase to enable them to handle the situations.

"The key is learning how to keep your heart rate variability at a minimum," he said. "If you do that, your heart rate is not as reactive to outside stimuli. You're more in control."

In his three, two-hour classes, Walsh teaches how to "feel" the heartbeat.

"We begin by fully inhaling and fully exhaling, which slows breathing and lowers blood pressure," he said. "Then we hold our breath for a few seconds, which enables us to feel our heartbeat better."

Walsh then teaches rhythmic breathing, the art of breathing in unison with one's heartbeat.

"After doing rhythmic breathing for 15 to 20 minutes, your heart rate variability goes down," Walsh said. "You're more in mastery of yourself."

The class also involves meditation, tai chi movements, and the use of a biofeedback device that measures heart rate variability.

"The meditation helps you become more aware of your surroundings," Walsh said. "It helps you get more in touch with your emotions."

Walsh said heart rhythm meditation can improve a person's overall health and well being.

"Over time, it can enable you to affect your state of being at any time and in any place, whether you're sitting in a plane or standing in line at the grocery store," he said.

Walsh earned his certification to teach the class in the spring of 2003, and began teaching it for Bloomington Hospital in February 2004.

He said practicing heart rhythm meditation has helped him lose 40 pounds and lower his blood pressure.

"It's also enabled me to play the piano with more expression and not obsess about things," he said. "It's easier for me to decide what's important for me and what's not."

Reporter Dann Denny can be reached at 331-4350 or by e-mail at ddenny@heraldt.com.

© 1997 - 2005 Hoosiertimes Inc. No commercial reproduction without prior written consent.