



A Thought-Full Life — Finding Your Missing Peace

Vicki Pepper MS, RD

Did you know that you have about 50,000 to 70,000 thoughts every day? That's nearly 50 thoughts per minute, more than one per second. You would think (pun intended) that with all that activity you would have a tremendously productive life, but research indicates that you repeat about 98% of the same thoughts every day. If you are like the average person your inner world and productivity is further hindered by the fact that as much as 80% of your thoughts are critical and negative.

Whether your mind is over-crowded with positive or negative thoughts, all that repeated mental activity leaves little room to breathe, feel, and experience life. Too many random thoughts not only crowds out meaningful contact with yourself, it crowds out contact with the important people in your life. The result is you're left feeling alone, exhausted, out of balance, and longing for an inner peace that seems elusive.

Human beings instinctively strive to maintain a peaceful inner world; it is the glue that holds us together mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Unfortunately, if you are like most, you may allow your thoughts to come and go without much awareness (or dare we say without much thought!) When you leave your thoughts unchallenged, you tend to accept your thoughts as truth, unconsciously giving them permission to shape your beliefs about yourself, about others, and your life.

What can happen when you unconsciously accept random negative thoughts? Remember that you are connected as a whole in mind, body, emotions, and spirit. Our culture looks for physical causes when you experience pain or sickness; yet we know that physical symptoms do have a connection to your perceptions, emotions, and

experiences. When you are emotionally, mentally, or spiritually out of balance, you may experience it as physical distress.

When the pendulum of your lifestyle swings too far to one side, it will inevitably swing equally far to the other side. A lack of inner peace and balance will eventually lead to an unbalanced, unhealthy lifestyle. Too much work, too little rest, grief, unmet needs, no play, excessive stress, and not enough meaningful time with loved ones or in activities you enjoy can easily cause you to swing towards too much drinking, shopping, eating, TV, or other perceived stress reducers.

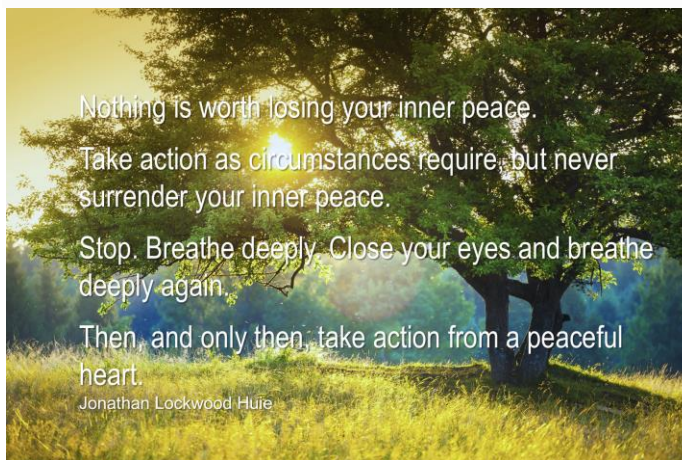
No matter what good intentions you have for living a healthy lifestyle, you simply cannot sustain the energy it takes to stay fit, lose weight, or avoid destructive behaviors when your inner world is in distress. However, you can sustain the energy to live a healthy lifestyle when your inner world is at peace. In fact, many behaviorists would argue that it is the first step to real change, healing, and transformation.

Because real and lasting behavior change begins in your mind, you are the only one who can create and maintain your inner balance and peace. Although you may find mentors and inspiration along the way, your road to inner peace is a solitary journey.

Finding your *missing peace* means finding that quiet place inside of yourself and paying attention to it. Prayer, meditation, self-hypnosis, and biofeedback are tools that can help you find that quiet place and quiet your mind. As you learn to quiet your mind, you can begin to be aware of your thoughts. By observing how your thoughts differ from the way you really feel, you can choose to place a different thought in your mind which more accurately reflects the way you feel.

Negative thinking, fear, anger, resistance and avoidance act like quicksand; immobilizing your efforts. It is your desires, dreams, positive relationships, and connection to yourself and others that are your lifelines back to peace.

Pursuing positive activities helps promote positive thoughts. Begin to practice lifestyle habits that help keep you balanced; try massage, listen to music you enjoy, spend time with people (or animals) you love, practice a hobby you have a passion for, learn a new skill. These are activities that nurture your soul and help you recover from every day stressors. Deliberately taking time off from normal routines and going to a quiet place of reflection, such as the country or the seashore, is another way to foster equilibrium.



Whatever method of relaxation you chose, always include a foundation of deep and measured breathing. Deep breathing helps to still your mind (actually changes brain wave activity) and quiets your spirit. When you practice deep breathing along with other centering activities, it becomes a physical cue triggering deeper relaxation. This is the first step in teaching yourself to remain calm despite a hectic life. As you become more

efficient in quieting your inner world, you will feel peace, stabilize your emotions, and nurture your spirit. The more you practice the easier it will become to achieve inner peace.

Building a peaceful inner world is so important for health that the **Positive Choice Integrative Wellness Center** includes work on inner balance in all of their wellness programs. One of the tools we use to help people build a foundation of deep breathing is the paced breathing tapes we have on our website (positivechoice.org/biofeedback/paced-breathing-tapes). The tapes can be used to practice breathing techniques. There are several tapes to choose from — all of which play peaceful music. Each tape has sound-tones which rise and fall and (4 different speeds to choose from) act as cues to help pace your breathing.

The important thing to remember is not to compare your progress to others. You will get there in your own way and at your own pace. Maintaining balance is a process, you will always have to make adjustments, as everyday challenges create waves that cause you to lose hold of your peace.

If you find yourself stuck in a rut, don't feel bad. You may lack the tools or the support to bring yourself back to a peaceful state. It is at those times that finding support help is important. One option to consider is biofeedback. At the **Positive Choice Integrative Wellness Center** a biofeedback appointment includes working with a therapist who has a doctorate in health psychology. Practicing deep breathing and relaxation techniques while using sophisticated multi-sensory biofeedback equipment can help you learn to quiet your thoughts and voluntarily trigger a peaceful and relaxed state that will stimulate your body's natural healing mechanisms.

If you find that stress and/or lack of inner balance is disrupting your weight or fitness we offer weight management programs that teach mindful eating and deep breathing and all our fitness services emphasize balance.

Whatever ways you find support, it is worth your efforts as you will find the peace and the power to make a real difference in your life and consequently the lives of others.