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## Posture and breathing techniques can help you keep anxiety at bay

# **Learn to control your body for true peace of mind**

### Feeling under pressure? Calm down under the relaxing influence of Saeed Ansari, says Susie Weldon

In today's busy, stressful world, it is rare to meet someone as relaxed and restful as Saeed Ansari. His face glows with an inner peace that is both refreshing and immensely appealing. But then what else would you expect from a yoga teacher who is planning to set up a stress awareness centre in Easton, Bristol? Creating the centre has been a long-held dream of Saeed, who believes it is urgently needed to enable people to deal with the increasing pressures of modern life. "Most of the time we are not relaxed.

The moment you wake up, you are rushing, rushing, and rushing. You go to work and your system is already running on high. It takes time to settle down but your work puts even more pressure on you," he says. "We are doing too much in society today. We humans are expected to do too much at high speed, but we are not robots or machines. We have to find something to do to relax, to burn off the excessive stress in our lives."

Saeed's words will find an echo in many people's minds. According to the British safety council, a third of Britain's workforce is now affected by stress which cost Britain's industry 90 million working days a year. At the same time there has been an explosion in the stress counselling 'industry'. Stress-busting books have dominated the bestselling book charts over recent years, calling on readers to take stock and calm down.

The little Book of Calm sold 376,000 copies in Britain and topped the Sunday Times' list of best-selling paper backs. In America, Richard Carlson sold five million copies of his self-help book Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, which became the fastest selling book of all time in the States. Strangely enough, stress itself is not the problem, says Saeed, who gave up his job in computer aided design in 1986 to teach yoga: "Stress in itself is neither helpful nor harmful. It is a motivating factor - We need it. It is distress that is harmful." By distress, Saeed means too much stress- or too little. Too much puts huge physical and emotional pressures on us; too little leaves us under stimulated. Most people probably feel they suffer from too much rather than too little stress. But the real problem, of course, is not how much stress you experience but how you deal with it. Saeed believes we have lost the art of managing our stress adequately.

Too often we react instantly to difficult situations, rather than being able to stand back and analyse why we are feeling angry or upset. At the same time we often have difficulty expressing our emotions, which means our hurt or anger festers unresolved within us. "When I was a boy in India my grandfather taught me the art of self-observation and self-examination in order to bring back my mental balance," He says. "A relaxed body and a relaxed mind is the first criteria.

If your mind is not relaxed, your body will also not be relaxed." That is because we react to stress both physically and mentally, and neither response can be addressed in isolation from one another. Hormones released by the pituitary and adrenal glands flood through the body when we are under stress. These cause a variety of effects: Our hearts pump faster and our bronchial tubes expand to enable deeper breathing, for example. These effects are vital in certain situations, such as when we are in danger. They prepare the body for what is termed the fight-or-flight response. But if we exist in a state of high stress over the long term, without being able to resolve the situation, the results can be serious damage to our psychological and physical health.

Stress can lead to anxiety and depression as well as chronic or even life-threatening conditions such as heart disease. "It's like cancer: The pain is what you feel, the lump is the cause. Take away the lump and you take away the cause. In a way, what I can teach is psychological surgery," he says. Saeed has developed a stress-busting programme based on yoga, which has been practising since

childhood and has taught to at least 2,000 people at Easton Leisure Centre, Saint Pauls Sports Academy and Henbury leisure centre.

The programme uses postures, breathing and self-awareness techniques to help people control their physical response to stressful situations. The idea is to transform an angry or hurt emotional response into a calm one by controlling the body's automatic physical reaction to stress. For example, breathing slowly and deeply acts as a calming influence on the body- and therefore also on the mind. "Most importantly you will discover that you can become aware of your mental response, whether it is negative or positive, destructive or constructive, and so can minimise your daily stresses," he says. There is another benefit, according to Saeed. People also learn to express their feelings more freely: "That means they are nicer people too and in addition they have nicer minds as a result of being unburdened by guilt."

Anyone interested in learning more about Saeed's stress awareness programme may contact him on 0117 939 6375

'Becoming Aware Of your mental response can help to minimise daily stresses'