

HUFFPOST HEALTHY LIVING



Tevis Trower [Become a fan](#)

Worklife strategies and corporate yoga expert



The 3:00 Rollercoaster

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Imagine the scene: Sitting in a corporate cafeteria, I'm talking to one of my clients. He's the director of training for one of the least-loved companies in the world, home of some of the best-loved brands. After discussing exciting programs to generate greater creativity, engagement and passion amongst the hundreds of employees under his care, when I ask him what he REALLY wants us to solve, his response: "Teach me how to stay awake at 3PM and how to go back to sleep at 3AM."

Sound familiar? No matter how auspicious or enlightened we think we are, we've got this little thing called the human body that intervenes at the most inconvenient times. The anxiety/crash conundrum is increasingly familiar and present in the media and among medical professionals. Check out the site for Harvard Medical School's sleep clinic and their headlining act is to announce a party on January 23rd for the launch of "Healthy Sleep," a website dedicated to teaching poor stiffs like you and me how to get through the night. Who knew that in the 21st century we would buy water in bottles and turn to the bright minds at Harvard to teach us how to sleep?

From 3AM insomnia to 3PM narcolepsy, the culprit is an ongoing energetic volley for which RedBull and Ambien are no real answer. Long since we abandoned the tradition of the siesta, our lifestyle continues to conflict with our natural biorhythms. We stagnate in stationary positions for hours through the day, throw food into our systems and then wonder why our systems crash mid-afternoon. Because the battles we fight are ones of security and social position, in the darker hours our nervous systems are suspended in a state of sustained anxiety as we look for evil at every turn. No wonder we have a hard time getting a good night's sleep.

The constant in these two dysfunctions is our nervous system and the Human Stress Response. Our bodies are structured to manage a given bandwidth of inputs, food or otherwise. Think about all the inputs your body processes, including sights, sounds, ideas and food. You are constantly processing both literally and figuratively. This processing has the effect of either stimulating your nervous system to be alert to more inputs (insomnia) or demanding so much of your body's bandwidth that anything non-essential goes out the window (narcolepsy).

So what's the trick to mastering your response to either extreme? The easiest way to access and master your state of well being is your breath. Yep. That simple. If you want an easy,

instant access point to counteract that energetic volley, by working with your breath you've got VIP entree to your nervous system and can shift it into the state that best supports you.

In crash mode at 3PM, you need energetic stimulation. In anxiety mode, you need energetic soothing. Sound simple? Try these practices:

3PM Energy Boost -for when you feel the crash coming

* Observe the heaviness in your body - what does it FEEL like to be lethargic? Where do you most feel tiredness? Let your awareness of tiredness be like that of a scientist - focusing on the different parts of your body from feet to top of head. Use scientific precision to identify exactly what feels tired in you - neck, eyes, lower back. Then assess what tired energy feels like - exactly how would you describe it to someone who had never felt it? By going INTO these sensations we de-mystify them and remind ourselves that no matter how dull we are feeling, this too shall pass - with or without a grande skinny double capp. The scientific precision of the observation has the added benefit of giving your slack energy a point of focus.

* Sit back from your desk. Scoot your butt forward to the edge of your chair and make sure your feet are solidly on the ground aligned with your hips and knees. With your hands on your knees and elbows bent softly towards you, let your torso arch forward in a gentle curve. Inhale strongly into the length of your torso. As you exhale, round your spine so that your chin moves in and your back becomes a gentle curve. Inhale again deeply as you move your heart forward arch your spine again. Exhale powerfully rounding your chin in again until you feel the last. Repeat as needed to send a rush of oxygen throughout your torso for a quick and powerful energy boost.

3AM Calming - wide awake when you least want to be

* Try training your awareness on the very physical sensations of lying in your bed. Direct your attention to the sensations of the sheets, blankets, all of your muscles, your clothing on your skin and even your breath as you lay in your bed. Release all of your muscles and imagine you are being hugged to your bed by gravity's force. Allow yourself to surrender any physical effort, simply releasing.

* Now begin to count how long it takes you to inhale and how long it takes you exhale. Notice if you try to control or manipulate the breath, and just let that urge go. Simply feel your breath as it happens, from the very tip of your nose past your throat into all the different parts of your torso. Notice how the expansion of breath moves both the front of your body and the back of your body. When you've really watched and felt that sensation for several minutes, begin to lengthen each inhale and exhale.

The simplicity of these techniques belies the simple nature of our very animal existence: we are programmed to survive. If shutting down all other forms of energy other than processing

food and food alone at 3PM helps our survival, no matter how inconvenient in a practical sense our body says, "So be it." Programmed to survive, if our concerns are intangible worries about position and power, our adrenaline/cortisol induced state will also prevail. By using these tools to respond to each respective extreme, you can establish equanimity and allow yourself to exert mastery over your own system - no matter what might be happening around you.

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