



Is Greater Well-being Just A Breath Away?

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February 19 2013



So often, it takes you by surprise, that almost imperceptible twinge that begins at your temples or at the base of your skull. At first, you ignore it, assuming it will go away on its own. As the pain ratchets up a notch or two, you mutter under your breath because, with deadlines and appointments looming, it's not a good time for a headache. If you're like most of us, though, without thinking twice, you'll simply reach into your purse or wander to the break room, pop a few aspirins and get back to work. End of story.

What strikes Margot Rossi and Geraldine Plato about this scenario is that too often people don't take the time to consider the source of the headache.

"Our culture is so technology-driven, operating on a robotic-like schedule to meet the demands of being alive, without ever having learned how to take care of ourselves," says Rossi, who, with business partner Plato, has created the [Possibilities of Wellbeing Resource Center \(POWR Center\)](#) in Western North Carolina.

Plato is not unsympathetic to the drill. The former non-profit executive knows what it's like to have her hands full from dawn until dead-of-night raising three girls with her husband of 25 years while managing the demands of a full-time career.

"I was cutting corners," she remembers. "I wasn't getting enough sleep or self-care. I was tired but kept pushing myself to work. I know now I was tricking myself."

Although the two had known each other for years, a new connection was forged while Rossi, a well-respected acupuncturist and movement instructor, was on the faculty at Asheville-based Daoist Traditions College of Chinese Medical Arts. Plato had become a student-clinic client.

Rossi remembers, "Geraldine told me that as part of her leadership style, she wanted to encourage her employees to find time to take care of themselves, whether through massage, acupuncture, yoga, etc. I was impressed. It made sense that employees who are encouraged to take care of themselves would be happier, more creative and more productive, to say the least."

After leaving her corporate position, Plato, who always had a passion for complementary health and nutrition, decided the time was right to formalize her training by attending the New York-based Institute for Integrative Nutrition, ultimately earning a certified health coach designation from the American Association of Drugless Practitioners.

The two, who had long benefited from Eastern and complementary approaches to healthcare, knew others in their rural community were hungry for this information, something that resonated deeply for Rossi.

“In the late 80s, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer,” Rossi said. “She died after two years of conventional medical treatment. Alternatives were out there, but we didn’t know how to find or choose them.”

Dealing with her own health issues, too, Rossi started reading about Chinese medicine, spurring her decision to earn a masters’ degree in acupuncture.

“Our goal,” Rossi notes, “is to create a place where people can not only learn about alternatives to Western medicine but how to integrate both approaches as well. There’s a great deal of conflicting information out there. People often want to try an alternative approach but feel their doctor disapproves. We want to help practitioners work together so patients get the best care.”

A critical component of their service is also to educate people to understand that the way they live affects their health and wellbeing. Self-care, they believe, starts with self-awareness.

“What works for one person may not work for another. Yet, in many Western practices, physicians will treat people with the same symptoms in the same manner,” Plato says. “What I like about the Eastern philosophy of healthcare is that the practitioner asks a wealth of questions focused on lifestyle issues ranging from sleep and digestion to relationships and sex lives to personalize a diagnosis. That’s why self-awareness is critical.”

Rossi believes wellbeing is steeped in taking little breaks.

The following exercise provides a break from stress or a burst of energy when needed. She says it’s also an excellent sleep aid at night to do while lying down.

- Sit on the front edge of a chair, letting your pelvis tip forward to lengthen your spine.
- Plant your feet squarely on the ground.
- Rest your hands, palm up, on your thighs.
- Breathe in and out through your nose.
- Notice where your breath is moving: chest, rib case area, and/or belly?
- Compare your inhalation to your exhalation: which one takes longer or are they even?
- Relax your mid-section and slowly breathe in, letting the breath fill the belly. Feel the belly rise and expand as you inhale.
- As you slowly exhale, feel the belly relax and release.
- Regulate the breath so that the inhalation and exhalation take equal time.
- Continue breathing slowly and mindfully for one minute.

Both Plato and Rossi realize that clients may not know some answers immediately but believe the questions provide a starting point where they can begin tuning in. Rossi says focusing on breathing is one of the most profound ways to become more aware and build a better body sense.



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“Paying attention to your breath helps you pull the mind into the body,” she notes. “Ideally, if you can do some sort of meditation movement like yoga or qi gong, the body can speak to the mind and the mind can listen. It’s a wonderful feedback loop, one that should become your primary method for self-care.”

“I can’t tell you how many times I felt I didn’t have the time to check in with myself,” Plato adds. “This is a common problem for business women. That’s why we get burned out.”

POWR Center’s workshops are all about helping people check in. Rossi and Plato emphasize that an upcoming program titled “*Weight: Wintertime Gains Feed Springtime Losses*” is not about being handed a list of good and bad

foods with the goal of reaching a specific weight. Instead, it’s about helping participants create an internal sense of their relationships to food and cravings, and addressing the factors that will enable them to reach and maintain their best body weight from a physical and emotional standpoint.

“We’ve all been exposed to a simplistic food pyramid at one time or another,” Plato says. “But there are some shortcomings in that model. First, it doesn’t address the flavor of food or how it’s prepared. Second, there’s much more that nourishes you than just the food you eat. It’s just as important to look at areas such as career, hobbies, relationships and environmental aesthetics.”

Rossi shares her recent experiences with a client and former New York City executive currently challenged by a serious illness while trying to get a new business off the ground.

“One of the things I discovered when asking her a series of questions was that she didn’t eat breakfast or lunch,” Rossi says. “The client never considered that her dietary habits had a direct correlation to her illness. Little by little, she’s feeling more empowered that she plays an important role in her health.”

Rossi and Plato are not expecting people to change their lives in one fell swoop. “Our role is to help people create strategies that improve their overall health,” Plato notes. “It is, however, a step-by-step process. What change are they ready to make this week? It’s different for everybody. For one person, it might be getting an extra hour of sleep, something another client may not need. There is no formula. People have gotten used to looking for formulas, which is something we’re striving to change.”

While Rossi, in her private practice, sees more clients dealing with illness, the POWR Center will focus on prevention. Toward that end, the two are beginning to donate their personal collection of health and wellness books to the community library.

“We’re serving as a filter of sorts,” Plato says. “There are a lot of helpful books available. We’re gleaning the most reliable, respected sources and passing them on. Ultimately, the community as a whole will be healthier, and we’re completely aware of just how good that will feel.”