



## BLOW YOUR MIND

BY BETH BRIGGS

Let's do a little brainstorming this week and talk about how we can train our brains for better mental health! With a little practice, we can use our heads to help calm us down when we're stressed or anxious, or regulate our mood while at work or play.



### Brain Power

Our brains process our environment in two general ways - bottom-up processing (reacting to what we sense around us) and top-down processing (reacting to perceptions based on prior knowledge and experience). Bottom-up processing operates initially from the most primitive part of our brain, the brainstem; top-down processing begins in the most evolved, the cortex.

Anyone can learn to activate these more primitive parts of our lower brain regions by using activities and strategies meant to change or regulate our state of being. In other words, we can learn how to control our brains!

### The Brainstem

For these mental health strategies, we'll focus on the lower region of the brain, the brainstem. It regulates breathing, heart rate, and body temperature.

While at work, these techniques can be used to calm yourself when you are experiencing panic, anxiety, or other related feelings that are distressing.

- Deep Breathing - different breathing patterns [activate our brains](#) related to mood, attention, and body awareness. Try these different techniques:
  - **Progressive Breathing** - relax and decrease stress with the technique outlined [here](#).
  - **Belly Breathing** - also known as diaphragmatic breathing, check out another [previous blog](#) for a how-to and its benefits.
  - **Nostril Breathing** - check out [this video](#) for instructions on this exercise.
- Chewing gum or sucking mints
- Clothing that fits securely over your chest and stomach
- Petting an animal rhythmically
- Musical activity - listening to music, singing, drumming



### The Midbrain

The midbrain is the most forward portion of the brainstem and is responsible for fine motor and gross motor skills, movements, and balance.

While at work, these simple activities can be used to make the most of breaks in order to keep your body and mind regulated for work, staying focused and calm. After work, activities such as drawing, gardening, knitting, or something else that involves fine movement that is rhythmic can be a fantastic way to decompress.

- Isometrics - exercises involving static contraction of the muscle without movement of the joint.
- Balancing
- Resistance training
- Weightlifting
- Walking, jogging, or running

Try a shoulder isometric: Push the top of your hand into the wall. Hold 5-10 seconds



**About Beth Briggs, MS, ATC** || Beth is an athletic trainer on the Normal, IL team. She has recently graduated Illinois State University with her Master's degree in Kinesiology where she served as the athletic trainer for the Army ROTC and ISU's swim and dive team. When not working, Beth can be found cooking

too much food, in the gym, or spending time outdoors with her two pups, Elsie and Bear.

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