THE PAUSE

A newsletter about looking and feeling great with age

SESSION ONE

“Doc, Where Do We Start?”

"Before You Get Out of Bed, Before You Check Your Phone, Before the World Gets Its Hands on You, Take Control of Your Nervous System."

Before Your Feet Hit The Floor | Session One: The First Tool



Benji, me and Vicky

Susan is a new client, and this is our first coaching session. I call all my coaching clients on Wednesday. Each session, I teach them the next tool. Each tool follows the order of what I do

after I wake up, so I can look and feel better every day, in every way, as I age. This is the first tool I use to live younger, longer by weighing less and aging less.

“Doc, I’m excited. Where do we start?”

“You breathe. I'm going to teach you the breathing technique I use right after I wake. I call it T**hree-Six Breathing.”**

“Breathing? What does that have to do with getting rid of my menopause belly?”

"To reach the end, you must start at the beginning.

"I inhale through my nostrils for three seconds, then slowly exhale through pursed lips for six seconds. I repeat this for a few minutes, allowing my body to settle into a peaceful rhythm.”

“Doc, you told me your program would help me optimize my hormones, lose weight, improve my health, and become more disciplined. And the first thing you’re teaching me is how to breathe? I’ve been doing that my whole life.”

I had to smile.

“Of course you have. But you’ve also been eating your whole life. How’s that been working out?”

“Very funny, Doc.”

Susan’s sassy. In my experience, they make the best students.

“The way you start your day makes getting to your ideal weight smoother.

"It's nine seconds of breathing, repeated for a few minutes.”

“I *was* excited.”

Her sarcasm was not subtle.

“Susan, after more than four decades of treating patients and now coaching clients, I’ve learned something important. Most people spend their mornings reacting to life instead of preparing to live it. They wake up, grab their phones, check their messages, and immediately begin responding to everyone else’s needs.”

“That is exactly how my day starts.”

“Not after today. From now on, you become the boss of your body by managing your nervous system. From now on, you prepare yourself for the world and how you respond to it before you get out of bed.

“Before we start, let me tell you about my astrological sign.”

“Oh my, what did I get myself into?”

She’s right where I want her.

“I’m a Gemini.

"I’m not going to tell you about the Greek myth about twin brothers, but the story that most Geminis think being a Gemini means.”

"It's true. Most of the Geminis I know are bipolar.”

“Yes, that is the story I am going to go with. Most Geminis think being a Gemini means they are two people. Bipolar, as you say.

"The Gemini story is actually a story about twin brothers: one mortal and the other immortal, and the immortal one chooses to be mortal instead of living life without his brother.

"Anyway, the Gemini we are going to discuss today is how people believe Geminis are two people.

"My story is going to revolve around our nervous system being bipolar, as you say..

“But, before I get into our nervous system, the story of the twins teaches us that longevity isn't simply about accumulating more birthdays, but about accumulating more moments with the people who make those birthdays meaningful.

‘I had to get that in because that's what Weigh Less Age Less is all about.

"Forgive me, I couldn't just pass by that.

"I'll get back to the nervous system.

“Your nervous system is bipolar, and since they are actually one, they need each other to function correctly.

“One half of our nervous system is jumpy. It’s always on the lookout.

“Imagine a bee flies near your face. What do you do?”

“I start running and swatting. I hate the thought of being stung by a bee.”

"That's your sympathetic nervous system.”

“The other half is just as strong, but it’s different. It’s called the parasympathetic nervous system.

“It stands peacefully as the bee buzzes near your face and remains cool, calm, and collected until the bee flies away.

"Here's what I want you to understand. Both nervous systems have the same basic survival equipment. Both can run from danger. Both can protect themselves. But one spends its time preparing for emergencies that may never happen, while the other responds when necessary and relaxes the rest of the time.”

“Doc, my nervous system is definitely the first one.”

“So is my wife’s- when a bee gets near her, she nearly has a panic attack.

“Most of us are stuck in the sympathetic nervous system mode, especially when we let the pressures of everyday life keep our nervous systems on high alert.

“Think about it. During your initial consultation, you were worried about your weight, frustrated because the diets that worked when you were younger don’t work anymore, concerned about your health, your family, your finances, and perhaps what the next twenty years of your life will look like.”

“And that’s before breakfast,” Susan interrupted.

I laughed.

“Exactly. But here’s the good news. You can learn to influence which nervous system is activated.”

“So my nervous system is like you, a Gemini, bipolar?”

“Okay. Yes. One prepares you to fight and flee. The other helps you rest, digest, recover, and conserve energy. Neither is bad. You need both. The secret is learning how to move between them.”

“And that’s why you are going to teach me how to breathe?”

“Yes, because the biggest obstacle that gets in the way of nearly all my clients is stress.

“Let me say that in a different way. The other shoe seems always to be hanging over a cliff, ready to drop. There will always be stress in our lives. How we manage stress makes it a problem or a solution.

“And that is what three-six breathing is all about. It is the first tool we use to manage stress so you succeed in navigating obstacles and achieving your ideal weight, in all areas of your life, all four strands of your life.”

“Strands?”

I shouldn’t have opened that box.

“You will learn all about that in a couple more classes, but that is a good segue into HOPE.

“HOPE has four strands: **H**ormone Optimization, **O**ptimal Body, **P**eak Health, and **E**nlightened Discipline. To optimize our lives, the four strands must be intertwined. I promise you will become an expert at intertwining them.

"That's where Three-Six Breathing comes in.

“Three-Six Breathing activates the parasympathetic mode.

THE VAGUS NERVE

“Susan, have you ever heard of the vagus nerve?”

"Can't say that I have.”

“Then let me introduce you to one of the most fascinating nerves in your body.

“The vagus nerve is one of the twelve cranial nerves that went rogue. It decided to travel down into your body. The other eleven stayed in your cranium.

"The Vagus nerve is the communication highway that connects your brain and body. It's, in essence, your parasympathetic nervous system, the system involved in rest, digestion, and recovery.

“Think of your nervous system as your gas pedal.

“When your sympathetic nervous system is activated, you are pressing down on it, and you accelerate. It prepares you to respond to challenges quickly.

“Your parasympathetic nervous system lets off the pressure on the accelerator. It allows you to slow down, especially when that extra alertness isn't necessary.

"The vagus nerve, your parasympathetic nervous system, reacts when you let off the accelerator, and the sympathetic nervous system reacts when you press on the accelerator.

"Here's where it gets interesting. One way to release the pressure on your gas pedal is to practice conscious breathing.

“Breathing is what most of us think is automatic, yet we can also control it voluntarily. Most of our organs don’t give us that option. We can’t simply tell our hearts to slow down or command our digestive systems to relax. But we can change our breathing rhythm to switch on the parasympathetic nervous system and take our foot off the pedal.

“When you breathe slowly and comfortably, your heart rate naturally changes with each breath. It tends to speed up slightly when you inhale and slow down when you exhale. The vagus nerve influences this relationship between breathing and heart rate.”

“Is that why you make the exhale twice as long?”

"That's one reason. The longer exhale gives you a comfortable rhythm that encourages you to slow down.

“Researchers found that slow breathing increased relaxation of your heart’s rhythm. This means breathing is much more than simply moving air in and out of your lungs.

"Here's what I want you to remember.

“You cannot eliminate every stressful situation from your life. But you can practice influencing how your body responds to those situations.”

“And I can do that before getting out of bed?”

"That's exactly where I want you to begin your day”

Enlightened Discipline

“Doc, I understand how breathing might help my nervous system. Can it help with my mind because that's what I can't turn off?”

“Susan, tell me what you normally do when you wake up.”

“I check my phone.”

“And what do you find?”

“Emails, messages, news, things I need to do. Sometimes something upsetting.”

“And how do you feel afterward?”

“Depends on what I read. Sometimes what I see stresses or angers me.”

"That's what I want to change. I don’t want the first few minutes of your day controlled by whatever message your phone delivers.

“When I wake around four, Vicky is usually sleeping beside me. Benji has claimed his usual territory next to me, and the house is wonderfully quiet. I have a few precious minutes when nobody needs anything from me.”

“Except Benji.” Susan blurts.

“Benji just needs to be touching me.”

Susan chuckled.

“Those quiet minutes are important to me. Before I begin learning, writing, teaching, I want to prepare my mind for the day ahead. And the first thing I do is breathe.”

“Does it really make that much difference?”

"There's some fascinating research suggesting it can.”

“Researchers have found that practicing breathing for just five minutes daily improved mood and breathing rate.”

“Only five minutes?”

“Five minutes. Think about that. We spend more time deciding what to watch on Netflix.

“I want you to begin recognizing that your emotional state can be managed.

“Breathing doesn’t erase worries, solve family problems, or make difficult decisions disappear. But it can create a period of calm where we relax and think clearly so that we can make better decisions.”

"I'll test it.”

“This is the first exercise. We have three more to learn before we even get out of bed.”

“Great,” she said again, sarcastically.

“Not yet, but you’ll get there.

“So, How Do I Become Great?”

“When you wake, close your eyes. Relax your shoulders, unclench your jaw, and allow your body to settle into the mattress.”

“Can I do it in a chair?”

“Of course you can. I’ve always found that, with any tool, you use it in a way that gets the job done. But do this first, before you enter the day.

“Breathe in gently through your nose while counting to three.

“Inhale: One ... Two ... Three.

“Now exhale slowly through pursed lips comfortably while counting to six.”

“Exhale: One ... Two ... Three ... Four ... Five ... Six.

"That's one breath. Now repeat.

“The goal is comfortable, unhurried breathing, not taking the biggest breaths possible.

“Start with a minute or two. If the rhythm feels comfortable, work toward three to five minutes. If six seconds feels too long for the exhale, shorten it until you can breathe naturally. And if you feel dizzy or uncomfortable, stop and return to your normal breathing.”

“Do I need to count the whole time?”

“At first, yes. Eventually, you’ll become familiar with the rhythm. But don’t turn this into another task you have to perform perfectly. This is supposed to be peaceful.”

“And what am I supposed to think about?”

“Nothing in particular. When thoughts enter your mind, don’t fight them. Just return your attention to your breathing. We’ll work on your thoughts in another lesson.”

Susan was quiet for a moment.

“Doc, can I ask you something personal?”

“Of course.”

“Why do you do all this? I mean, you’re seventy years old. You’re retired. You could sleep until eight, drink your coffee, binge Netflix, and enjoy the rest of your life.”

I smiled.

“Susan, I am enjoying the rest of my life. That’s exactly why I do this.”

“I have eight grandchildren, and I want to dance at every one of their weddings. I don’t simply want more years on this earth. I want more years to do the things I love, with the people I love.

"That's what Weigh Less · Age Less means to me. I want to live younger, longer. And for me to do that, I have to live within my God-given purpose, and that is to help you do the same.

“In essence, the more people I reach and teach, the better life is.

“Your God-given purpose?”

“It better be because I have never done anything else.

“Now I want you to make one small commitment.

“Tomorrow morning, before you get out of bed, give yourself three minutes. Don’t worry about your weight. Don’t worry about yesterday’s mistakes. Don’t worry about everything you need to accomplish.

“Just breathe.

"We're preparing your mind for the life you want to live. Because the next tool I’m going to teach you is something I call Five-Sense Awareness.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“It is. But for this week, I only want you practicing Three-Six Breathing.”

“Doc, I have to admit something. When you mentioned that the first lesson would be about breathing, I thought you were a little crazy.”

“And now?”

"You're still crazy.”

I laughed.

“Good. Because tomorrow morning, while Vicky is sleeping and Benji has his chin on me, I’ll be doing exactly what I’ve asked you to do. Three-six breathing. And preparing for another wonderful day.”

After we hung up, I thought about how often we overlook the simplest tools available to us. We search for complicated answers, expensive supplements, and elaborate routines, sometimes forgetting that meaningful change can begin with something as ordinary as a breath.

Three-Six Breathing won’t solve every problem in your life. But it can give you a few quiet minutes to begin your day with intention rather than reaction.

And when your goal is to live younger, longer, those small daily decisions matter.

Tomorrow morning, before the world asks anything of you, give yourself three minutes.

You deserve at least that much.

One Small Favor Before You Go

If you're new to Weigh Less · Age Less, welcome.

Vicky and I have spent our entire adult lives helping women and men improve their hormones, body, health, and discipline. Now, through this publication, I'm sharing the lessons, tools, and experiences that have shaped my approach over more than four decades.

This chapter is the first lesson in a much larger journey. In the chapters ahead, I'll introduce you to the other tools I use throughout my day, from the moment I wake until I open my eyes the next morning.

Think of a friend who wakes up feeling overwhelmed. Someone who's struggling with their weight, worried about getting older, or simply looking for a better way to begin the day. **Share Weigh Less · Age Less with that person.** You might be giving them something they didn't realize they needed: three peaceful minutes that are entirely theirs. Click on the forward button and forward this email to your best friend.

Oh, before you go on with your day, I have a question for you.

What's the very first thing you do when you wake up?

Do you reach for your phone, think about your responsibilities, or take a few moments for yourself?

Reply to this email and tell me, because everything I have ever learned that was worth more than any book I read was what my patients and clients have taught me.

Until next time,

Doc Mac

Weigh Less · Age Less

Live Younger, Longer.

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Medical Disclaimer

This article is intended for general education and wellness and is not a substitute for individualized medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Slow breathing exercises are generally well tolerated, but responses vary. Individuals with significant cardiovascular or respiratory conditions, a history of fainting, or other medical concerns should consult their healthcare practitioner before beginning a new breathing practice. Never force your breathing or continue if you feel dizzy, short of breath, or uncomfortable. The studies discussed examine slow breathing techniques generally and do not establish that the specific Three-Six Breathing routine prevents disease, produces weight loss, or directly optimizes hormone levels.