

Initially Prof Caycedo carried out studies into clinical hypnosis, phenomenology (a branch of philosophy) and Western relaxation techniques such as autogenic training and progressive muscle relaxation. He then travelled to India, Tibet and Japan where he studied yoga, Buddhist meditation and Japanese Zen. It was through combining these philosophies and techniques that sophrology was born. At first, sophrology was mainly practised within the areas of medicine and psychiatry, but it soon grew in popularity throughout the French and Spanish-speaking world with training programmes being set up for doctors and sports coaches.

It is now a very popular healing method in France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium where it is used in hospitals for pain management and to treat sleep disorders, while midwives use it for birth preparation. Sophrology is also used in sports psychology, the arts, education and in business for stress relief and prevention of Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI).



The body scan

One of the main principles of sophrology is that by relaxing the body, you also calm the mind. A particularly effective exercise which is used is the 'body scan', whereby the person focuses on individual body parts, from head to toe, relaxing and becoming separately aware of each part. This brings about a deep relaxation of the muscles, whilst the individual reaches a state of consciousness somewhere between being awake and asleep (known as the 'sophroliminal level') where the mind is so calm that the intellect won't have its say. This quiets the chatter of the inner mind in order to connect with our deeper, wiser intuitive mind.

How it helps

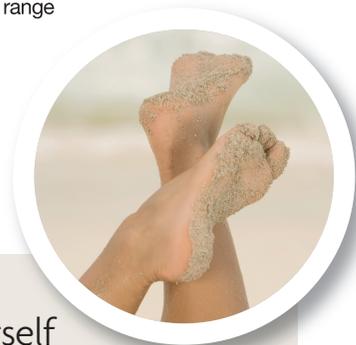
Sophrology can help with the following complaints

- Stress and tension
- Self-development, developing creativity, interpersonal skills, inner resources
- Building self-confidence and self-esteem
- Managing emotions
- Weight problems and self-image
- Increasing energy levels

It can help to ease the following conditions:

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|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ■ Anxiety | ■ Pain |
| ■ Burnout | ■ Digestive problems or IBS |
| ■ Phobias | ■ ME or chronic fatigue syndrome |
| ■ Sleep problems, insomnia | ■ Depression |
| ■ Addictions | |

Sophrology is practised both in group sessions and one-to-ones. In group sessions, people are taught the basic methods and are able to start using some of the techniques on their own. A typical one-to-one session will begin with a consultation to assess the client's needs. Then the sophrologist will then guide the client through a range of mental and physical exercises and afterwards there will be a chance for feedback.



Do try this at home

Here are some simple sophrology exercises that you can try out yourself

To lower anxiety

Breathe in and gently contract the muscles in your whole body, sensing any tension or discomfort. Breathe out loudly, let go and completely relax the muscles, letting the tensions flow away. Do this three times and listen to how you are feeling inside. You can do this exercise sitting down, lying down or standing up.

To sleep better

Count up to three in your mind as you breathe in, count up to four as you breathe out and count up to three while you gently hold your breath, your lungs empty and then start all over again. Do this at your own pace and

change the counts if this is better for you but keep the exercise as regular as you can until you feel that you are calming down.

To boost your energy

Close your eyes and imagine that you find yourself in a very sunny place. Imagine that each time you breathe in, you are breathing in sun rays, sun light, sun warmth and energy. Let this energy, this warmth into your body and imagine it spreading everywhere, from your head to your arms, your back and your feet. Feel the energising power of the sun and its warmth. Hold this visualisation for a few minutes before opening your eyes and bringing yourself back to the awareness of the room.

To better manage your stress

Several times a day, for a few seconds, close your eyes, unclench your jaw, relax your shoulders (let them drop to the floor) and breathe out loudly.

To help deal with anger

Stand up in a comfortable position and take a cushion in your hands. Close your eyes and imagine you are putting into the cushion all your anger; everything and everyone that is making you angry. Breathe in deeply and breathe out loudly while throwing the cushion on the floor. Do this three times and then take a little time to listen to how you are feeling.