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The Forgotten Side of Fitness: Emotions

BOULDER CREEK, CA – March 9, 2012 – Do your fitness goals also include mind and emotions? If not, they should. Elite athletes know it best: finely tuned muscles, lightning reflexes and stellar agility mean nothing when the mind and emotions are not in sync.

With spring and warmer weather approaching, many are re-embracing fitness and weight-loss goals and HeartMath® LLC, a cutting-edge performance company, points to research on emotions that helps complete the picture of true fitness. HeartMath is best known for performance solutions developed from more than 20 years of research, which has helped define a critical link between emotions, heart function and performance.

Behavioral psychologist Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., said, “Emotions have a measurable affect on the body that can influence health, wellness and fitness. Our inner fitness and emotional resilience is equally important as physical fitness.” Rozman serves as president and CEO of HeartMath, whose company produces performance tools and programs being used by Olympic gold medalists, PGA champions, NFL stars as well as regular fitness-minded individuals.

Rozman said, “Think of your emotion-resilience capacity like the amount of gas you have in your car. The more you have, the farther you can go.”

“In a sense, our level of inner fitness determines how resilient we are emotionally,” said Rozman. “And a the best way to understand inner fitness is through the science of coherence.”

Coherence is psycho-physiological state occurring when the rhythms of the brain, heart and nervous system all operate in harmony. The body typically enters coherence when positive emotions are being experienced. Negative emotions, however, trigger inefficient fight-or-flight responses in the body that often drain energy, reduce performance efficiency, inhibit mental clarity and derail the coherent state.

Research shows that repeated episodes of unmanaged emotions such as anger, frustration, worry and anxiety can cause adrenaline and cortisol – known as stress hormones – to release when they are not actually needed.

An evolutionary biology view suggests these stress hormones were perhaps reserved for real-time emergencies such as running from a saber-tooth tiger.

Learn the Quick Coherence®
Technique Developed by HeartMath

Step 1: Heart Focus
Gently focus your attention in the area of your heart. If you like, you can put your hand over your heart to help. If your mind wanders out of habit, just keep shifting your attention back to the area of your heart.

Step 2: Heart Breathing
As you focus on the area of your heart, pretend your breath is flowing in and out through that area. This helps your mind and energy to stay focused and your respiration and heart rhythms to synchronize. Breathe slowly and gently, until your breathing feels smooth and balanced, not forced. Continue to breathe with ease until you find a natural inner rhythm that feels good to you.

Step 3: Heart Feeling
As you continue to breathe, recall a positive feeling, a time when you *felt* good inside, now try to re-experience the feeling. This could be a feeling of appreciation or care towards a special person, a pet, a place you enjoy or an activity that was fun. Allow yourself to *feel* this good feeling of appreciation or care. If you can't feel anything it's okay, just try to find a sincere attitude of appreciation or care. Once you’ve found a positive feeling or attitude, you can sustain it by continuing your heart focus, heart breathing and heart feeling. It’s that simple.

However, in modern times they can be triggered by an irritating email, political policies that don't sit well or the frustration of not having enough time to do what's needed. Cue these emotions daily and, over time, these stress hormones can tax cell metabolism and burn extra energy. Decreases in cardiovascular efficiency and accelerated aging have also been linked to negative emotional states.

According to Rozman, creating a coherent emotion state can sometimes mean the difference between winning and losing for athletes. As for the average Joe, it can be the difference between feeling exhausted and spent at the end of the day, or having the emotional intention to fuel commitments towards improving health and fitness.

For many people stress has become *the norm* and a way of life – considering that at least one third of Americans report being extremely stressed, according to the American Psychological Association. Many people are living in a depleted state, using energy reserves to keep the mind, emotions and body going.

Rozman said that fitness-minded people will often to great lengths to get their body refined; yet the emotions are often forgotten in the fitness equation. "Without a doubt emotions impact the wholeness picture of health and resilience," she said.

"Each time a we repeat a habit, whether it is an attitude, behavior or a repetitive task like driving a car – it becomes more reinforced and unconscious," Rozman said. "The same is true with stress. Ongoing, low-grade stress – such as those daily irritations, worry and frustrations – can do more harm to the body, mind and emotions than one large stressful event can."

"We've studied the physiology of stress in thousands of people, of all ages, over the last 20 years," she said. "A common factor observed in our work is that although someone can 'think' they're not stressed or defer it as just an irritation or a low-grade anxiety, the stress reaction has already been triggered. The body is responding to what the person really feels and the body registers even the subtle everyday irks and frustrations as stress."

To help people become more attune their inner rhythms and increase their inner fitness, HeartMath developed a handheld technology called emWave2 that gives an instant reading of coherence levels in the body. Peak performance and mental toughness coach Sara Gilman, Clinical Psychology M.S., uses the emWave technology with clients who are seeking a performance edge.

"It's one of the tools I've adopted because clients are consistently telling me it's getting them results. From professional triathletes to kids in cheer competitions - the results are so consistent," she said.

Inducing a positive-emotion state with the help of emWave technology before and during performance can help synchronize the heart, brain and nervous system and get the user into a high performance state.

"You can objectively measure your emotion state and become familiar with coherence and what it feels like," said Gilman. "The coherence zone," as Gilman also calls it, "is our natural state and the emWave helps us get back to that when we need to perform more efficiently."

Gilman tells her clients to use the emWave for five to 10 minutes before a workout to help reboot their system with positive emotions. "With the emWave, nine times out of 10 they will want to go workout, whereas they couldn't get motivated before," Gillman said.

Attuning to beneficial inner rhythms and building coherence as a new baseline can lead to more energy and resilience. Learning to shift to coherence can also help release emotional stress as coherence completes the wholeness picture of fitness.

While emWave® technology is used by elite athletes and regular fitness goers, the technologies are also used in a broader range of settings to help boost optimal performance and reduce the effects of stressful emotions. The emWave technology is used by the U.S. Military, NASA, more than 10,000 health professionals, hospitals and health clinics, schools and Fortune 500 companies.

To learn more about HeartMath, visit www.heartmath.com and www.emwave.com.

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***About HeartMath*:**
The HeartMath LLC Company provides unique services, products and technologies to improve well-being and reduce emotional stress. Organizational clients include *Blue Cross Blue Shield* and *NASA*. HeartMath studies demonstrating a critical link between emotions, heart function and cognitive performance are published in numerous peer-reviewed journals such as *American Journal of Cardiology*, *Stress Medicine*, *Preventive Cardiology* and *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. HeartMath's award-winning emWave PSR won the 2009 Last Gadget Standing People's Choice Award at CES and was honored with the Awarded for Distinction and Innovation from the American Institute of Stress. Doc Childre is the creator of the emWave technology and the HeartMath System.