

Well-established and popular especially in France and Switzerland, but relatively new to people outside of Europe, Sophrology is a healing modality that combines Eastern traditions with modern Western approaches. It has its roots in yoga and Zen and Buddhist meditation, and incorporates elements of modern psychology and hypnosis. A highly structured discipline, specifically designed for modern living, it consists of practical physical and mental exercises aimed at achieving a prepared mind in a focused body.

According to Integrated Medicine Institute Sophrology therapist Celine Pellarin, "Sophrology can provide pragmatic and effective solutions to stress, sleep issues, anxieties and chronic pain. While it is widely used for birth preparation, it can also help people get ready for key events, such as interviews, public speaking, sports competitions and even surgery. Sophrology is proven to restore energy levels and enable people to enjoy a more conscious and happier life."

Sophrology also offers a great starting point for people who find it difficult to meditate. It provides many strategies to keep the mind still and present. This in turn, allows people to tune into their inner resources and address particular life or health issues.

A better way of being

French native Professor Alfonso Caycedo, the founding father of Sophrology, is a doctor of medicine and surgery, specialised in psychiatry and neurology. Unsatisfied with the then academic approach to psychological issues in the 1960s, he began to look for alternative methods to help people live a fuller life. One of his beliefs is that each and every person should be able to implement an empowering daily practice. He created Sophrology as an efficient complement to established medicine.

From 1988 to the present, Professor Caycedo continues to develop and improve the Sophrology method. The practice is highly influenced by his travels in India and Japan, where he studied Zen and yoga, bringing them into his psychology-based theory of human development.

"Most of the people I work with experience a better way of being after just a few sessions," says Celine. "At the beginning, people usually feel the body is more relaxed and the mind more calm. Overall, they feel more energised. Often after only a few sessions, people report that they have become more conscious, and that they can relate to themselves and others with greater kindness and optimism. That experience helps them to get further involved in the practice.

"For me as a therapist, Sophrology means putting an end to an unrealistic or negative vision of life in order to see things as they

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Simple and easy to learn, Sophrology aims to help people live more consciously, with their minds and bodies in harmony. *Samantha Wong* reports



Sophrology has its roots in yoga and Zen and Buddhist meditation

are and reinforce the positives we have in us. Many discover that if they can't change the world, well... at least they can work on changing how they approach things," Celine adds.

Promoting relaxation and focus, Sophrology can help people alleviate stress and anxiety, and learn how to take better care of themselves. It is for this reason that Sophrology has become a popular tool for birth preparation. Anxious mums, who are perhaps questioning their own capability to give birth, are pre-taught pain management techniques to increase their confidence and help them develop a positive attitude towards the big day.

A typical session

Sophrology is generally taught on a one-to-one basis, with the first session dedicated to clarifying objectives. "All sessions are tailored, we work according to the objective defined by the client," explains Celine. "Autonomy and empowerment is at the heart of how I teach Sophrology. My aim is to help the client discover what works best for him according to his needs and lifestyle."

Each session begins with Celine guiding a client through a deep, dynamic relaxation technique, which relaxes the body while the mind remains fully alert. The second step introduces a specific exercise related to the client's key objective. A straightforward set of tools are employed: breathing, visualisation, and/or simple body movements. The client is then advised to follow the practice himself on a daily basis.

"All sessions are recorded so that clients can practise at home and help themselves," Celine explains. "Many say that the 'do-it-yourself' aspect helps them to feel empowered and reach their objectives faster."

Celine herself discovered Sophrology when she was experiencing health issues, and suffering from insomnia and headaches. "The more I practised, the better I felt – not only during the sessions, but most importantly in my life," she says. "It became so meaningful to me, I decided to step back from my corporate career and specialise in Sophrology. I wanted to teach others to connect with themselves in a more positive way." 🌿

a zen baby
starts with
a zen mama!



Three-step relaxation technique

1. Become aware of your feet on the floor until you feel totally grounded.
2. Become aware of your breath and gently start slowing it down.
3. Become aware of your forehead, jaws and shoulders [for many, these are the key areas of tension]. Start relaxing them one after the other.

With a little bit of practice, you can learn how to relax your body deeply in minutes. Offer yourself these little breaks throughout the day and see how a bit of 'me time' can make a real difference.

Celine Pellarin provides Sophrology therapy sessions at the Integrated Medicine Institute in DB North Plaza, Discovery Bay. For more information, you can contact her on 2537 1087.