

What's Sophrology?

It's a method for relaxation and confidence that blends elements from yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. We asked subject matter expert, Sophrologist Dominique Antiglio, to break it down to basics and explain the benefits.

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Sophrology is nothing new – in Switzerland, at least. There, this practice for body and mind is mainstream. It's used in other parts of Europe, too, in schools, hospitals and offices, for example. A method for controlling stress and for self-development, it draws from a range of practices including yoga, meditation and mindfulness, combining techniques such as breathing, visualisation and gentle movement.

If you've already heard about Sophrology from here in the UK, that might be because of Swiss-born Dominique Antiglio. The qualified Sophrologist (she trained with Professor Alfonso Caycedo, who founded the method in 1960) is spreading the word. She's the author of *The Life-Changing Power of Sophrology* (Yellow Kite, £14.99) and founder

of the Sophrology clinic and online platform BeSophro (be-sophro.com).

"Life-changing" is how Dominique describes her personal experience of Sophrology. She was a young sportswoman aged 15 when her GP in Switzerland recommended she see a Sophrologist because her body "started letting [her] down" for no discernible physical reason. "Practising Sophrology made me aware I was feeling a lot of pressure and carrying a lot of tension I hadn't noticed."

Sophrology – the study of consciousness in harmony – can be used for a variety of reasons. It might be for general relaxation or a particular issue, like anxiety or trouble sleeping. It's also practised by people to help them prepare for future events, personal or professional – getting ready to give birth,

exams, interviews, speeches, or sporting competitions, for example.

You might well wonder what getting ready to give birth and giving a speech have in common. "We're talking about using Sophrology to develop our consciousness; expand our awareness," explains Dominique. "This can help us feel more confident in one instance and calmer in another."

So, you might take up Sophrology with one goal in mind, then also use it for another reason. The key, Dominique says, "is to set your intention before you start your practice for the day. For example, 'Today, my intention is to feel calmer.' Using your consciousness like this is a way to be more mindful, but also be in the driving seat of your life. It's empowering."

Sophrology is a programme with 12 'steps',

"It's a way to be more mindful, but also be in the driving seat of your life"

each with a different purpose. For example, the first is about enhancing bodily awareness and feeling more grounded. The second looks at the mind and improving focus. The third focuses on the body-mind connection, the fourth is about living according to your personal values, and the fifth and beyond explores your consciousness in depth.

"If you were really committed, you could do the 12 steps over two years, but there's no rush," Dominique says. "It's important to practise and then live, to feel the effect in →





your daily life. In fact, you could only do the first level and get a lot from it.”

More than reflection, Sophrology is something you actively practise. Dominique explains: “This means doing some simple exercises, usually with a practitioner or a recording. Often these start with you closing your eyes and doing a body scan. Then once you’ve connected with how you feel, there’s a ‘clearing’ exercise using the breath and easy movements. After that, there are exercises depending on what you’re trying to achieve at the time. There might be some standing movements to ground you, or visualisation to prepare for a future event, for example.”

Once you know a Sophrology sequence, you can then do it without the guidance of

a practitioner or recording. You can also extract elements of the practice according to how much time you have or where you are, like travelling on the train for instance.

There are a number of ways to try Sophrology. You can have a one-to-one with a practitioner if you want a very tailored approach, or attend a group class. There are also recordings and videos you can use. Dominique says she benefited from the exchange with a Sophrology practitioner in a one-to-one scenario. “It can be therapeutic to sit with someone who can actively listen to you and acknowledge how you feel.”

There are benefits to practising Sophrology in a group, too. “We run workplace workshops. When you have 20-30 people practising



together over a couple of weeks, you can see the connections forming between them,” Dominique says. “You don’t need to know someone’s name, where they come from or what they do in order to bond. We need more connection and community in life, especially when we’re stressed.”

One day, Sophrology may be as easily accessible to everyone here in the UK as it is in Switzerland. That is Dominique’s big hope. She refers to a recent report from the Global Wellness Summit, *Meditation Goes Plural*. “At first, there was just yoga. Now there are so many different styles of it. In the same way that first there was ‘yoga’, then many different types of yoga, we’ve all got to know about mediation and mindfulness, now people are

discovering other ways of connecting with consciousness,” she explains.

“These will only keep growing in number because so many of us want to feel calmer and more centred in our day-to-day life, and we need choice. People need to be able to find something that works for them.”

And although Dominique has now been practising Sophrology for herself for years, she often goes back to basics – for example, when she’s prepping for an important work event she uses some step-one bodily awareness exercises to help her feel grounded. “Wherever you are in your self-development, you’re never finished and need tools to help you in certain circumstances,” she says. “It’s an ongoing journey.” ♦