

The FAST Pathways® Academy - Havening Away Discomfort



So far you've been learning various ways to feel better by setting new mind patterns. Now we'll explore how to make changes inside your brain's chemistry, using Havening® - a relative new, and very versatile technique; which you can use on its own, or in combination with other FAST Pathways skills.

Havening's originator, Dr Ronald Ruden, is a physician with a PhD in Organic Chemistry. He created Havening from experimenting with numerous formulations, with thousands of patients. Traumatic or inescapably stressful experiences can become accidentally hard-wired into the neurology. Once this happens, exposure to the same stimulus (or even something broadly similar) will automatically generate the same emotional and physical response – feeling like it's happening all over again.

Even original events which were far from life-threatening can become accidentally encoded: Something as simple as being stuck in a lift can trigger on-going fear and avoidance of all confined spaces. Sometimes, even a picture of something related to the original event can produce that same extreme stress experience, as if someone was right back in the traumatising situation all over again.

This effect is rooted in the most primal parts of our brain – if sensory input is perceived as threatening, it's routed straight to the amygdala (the part of the brain which controls our Fight-Flight-Freeze response), bypassing evaluation. So no matter how illogical or disruptive it may be, that response runs again; even when the threat was only perceived - which can be deeply unpleasant.

Havening works uses a combination of light touch to the upper arms, face or hands; eye movement and distraction; designed to change the brain, de-linking the memory and permanently removing its negative effects. Dr Ruden's book "When the Past is Always Present" is a rich source of information on how it works, and further information is also available on the Havening website www.havening.org.

Trauma is just one of the many responses which Havening can de-code – here are some examples of people's unpleasant experiences, which we've used Havening to switch off:

- Removing the fear of having panic attacks when returning to a place or situation where they'd happened before
- Becoming able to comfortably work with a colleague, who used to wind them up within the first few words
- Switching off food or cigarette cravings, to stop destructive behaviour patterns
- Clearing up and clearing out the day's events from the thinking, before enjoying a full and restful night's sleep

- Switching off the fear of dogs, to be able to enjoy being out and about without constantly scanning for potential 'threats'
- Getting rid of the Monday-morning dread and overwhelm, to comfortably get up and get started with enjoying work
- Resolving flashbacks to a very upsetting experience (which had been causing repeat absences from work)
- Resolving the fear of public speaking or making presentations, to be able to enjoy the whole experience

One of the things I particularly like about Havening, is there's no need to keep yourself in that unpleasant state while you resolve it: Briefly thinking of the memory or stressful situation, is enough to activate the associated parts of your brain chemistry, so they can be smoothly decoded. After Havening, you'll still remember exactly what happened, but with the negative emotion gone.

So choose something to work on which is unpleasant enough to want to get rid of, but not too strong a response to work on alone. If there is something really unpleasant that you want to shift, you may find that first removing other, smaller auto-responses, makes the main one more comfortably manageable; or it may be advisable to work one-to-one with a trained practitioner.

Think of the response that you want to change. If it's a specific event that happened, remember that event in enough detail so that you feel the response again – you don't need to crank it up to its most uncomfortable; simply see what you saw, hear what you heard, until you feel again the way it makes you feel.

If it's a more generalised response, not rooted in any particular event; then think of a recent time when you felt that way. Again, see what you saw and hear what you heard (including what you were saying to yourself), so that you switch on those associated parts of your neurology.

The first time I tried Havening for myself, I didn't notice much of a difference – it was only when I did it again a few months later that I experienced how powerful it can be. That first time, I was thinking of a situation that I wasn't really that bothered by, I was just going through the motions; so when I thought about it, it was almost like I was remembering something I'd read about or watched in a movie, instead of having directly experiencing it for myself.

The second time, it was using something which had happened recently enough for me to be able to actually feel it again, rather than just remembering what had happened. So choose something where you can actually recreate the feeling you want to haven away.

So that you can calibrate as you apply Havening, give the strength of what you feel a score:

1 = perfectly comfortable

10 = as bad as it could possibly get

What number would you give to the feeling as you experience it right now?



Now you've activated your encoded neurology, by bringing that event or feeling into your awareness; it'll stay there for about 20 minutes, so there's no need to keep thinking about it.

There are a number of ingredients to successful Havening: Each one is a well-tried contributor to Havening's effectiveness, so it's important to follow the steps as described. As you'll be counting and singing or humming out loud, make sure you're somewhere comfortable to do this, without disturbing or being interrupted by anyone else.

It's a good idea to choose ahead of time what tune you'd like to use (and if you can't think of anything you particularly like, 'Happy Birthday', or a nursery rhyme, can work just as well).

Lesley's 'Missing'

It was about three years since Lesley had ended her relationship, with the man who she described as the love of her life. She knew it had been the right choice, as the relationship had become controlling and disruptive; but she still hadn't fully moved on.

Lesley's a very successful business woman - driven and focused, and she was frustrated to still be carrying around this thing, which could floor her every time she thought of it (and she thought about it a lot). As soon as she said the words 'I miss him', her eyes filled with tears.

She was sceptical about whether it could be resolved at all, let alone quickly. She was about to surprise herself: With two rounds of Havening, she brought down the discomfort from a 9 to a 2, and it stayed there. She thought of him only when she chose to, and then only with a slight tinge of regret. And finally, she moved on.

There may be times when you don't want to completely eliminate the feeling: Lesley kept that little bit of discomfort to stop her from repeating the same bad relationship choices – enough discomfort to make her pay attention when she thought about it; but without it coming to mind on its own.

The counting and singing activate different parts of your brain, making sure you do a really thorough job of breaking the encoding. You can count anything you'd like – others that I like to use, are to imagine that

- You're walking down a broad, sweeping staircase (the kind in glamorous movies), and count the steps
- You're watching a child skipping over a rope, and count each time their feet touch the ground
- You're being rowed along in a boat, smoothly gliding along, and count each time the oars dip into the water