

Exercises to release tension, relax and re-generate

Instructions:

Mindfulness Exercises

Mindfulness is used as a technique to help maintain positive mental health and manage a multitude of stress related problems. Many of the techniques are synonymous with meditation techniques. Meditation simply means ‘thinking about’. You are meditating all the time during your work.

Quieten the chattering mind is a highly valued skill to allow you to retain energy (otherwise wasted) and to think more clearly. This skill allows you to be conscious and aware of what is going on in the present moment, whilst acknowledging and accepting thoughts and feelings without judgement.

As humans our ability to think is one of our greatest skills and the ability, to think back to the past and learn from those experiences, or to project into the future to plan, can be extremely helpful. However, our inability to control *when & how* we think sometimes stops us from being calm and content. We can get stuck in the past, going back over and dwelling on events and drowning in those emotions as if they are happening now. Alternatively, we can be paralysed about worries and anxieties around events that may or may not happen in the future. Furthermore, there are times when we want to relax, sleep or enjoy some peace & quiet and whilst we can ensure that our physical environment is conducive to this, we are unable to quieten the incessant noise arising from the thoughts in our own heads which stop us from achieving the rest & relaxation we desire and need.

In addition to calming our thoughts and enabling us to deal more effectively with life’s challenges in the present moment, mindfulness can bring about long-term changes in mood and well-being. Studies in neuro-plasticity have shown that regular practice actually influences the way the brain works and how it structures itself. Indeed, the functionality of the hippocampus, the area that focuses on learning and memory, improves, the amygdala, that informs the flight or fight response, reduces in size and the limbic system that regulates emotions, also improves.

There are many meditative exercises that can help us achieve a “mindful state”. These exercises follow two core methods – focused awareness, channeling attention onto one specific subject matter, and open field awareness, where the mind focuses on whatever comes to the attention of any of the senses, without judgement or attachment to any one particular thing.

However, to achieve the overall objective of leading a calmer and less anxious life we need to embrace “being mindful” in everything that we do.

Mindfulness techniques

There are numerous books and phone apps that you can download to guide you through mindfulness exercises such as the body scan or eating a raisin mindfully!

Any activity you can think of can be used as a focal point for mindfulness training. Just allow the activity to be your anchor to the present moment.

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Example of mindful activity: Walking Mindfully is a good example. In this mindful activity, you simply bring your full attention to the simple act of walking.

Step 1: Concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, or the sensations and movement of your legs and arms as you take each step.

Step 2: Observe what is going on around you in the world - look around you and notice what you see, hear and sense. You don't have to try and ignore or blot out anything. Just observe everything that you experience, staying in the present moment as you do so. If thoughts pop up, just notice them too and then let them go and gently return your awareness to the walk.

As you practice Mindfulness, you will notice those thoughts intruding, and that's ok. The aim of Mindfulness is to continually bring our attention back to the activity, noticing those sensations, from outside and within you.

In fact, it's the very act of bringing your thoughts back to the activity that serves to strengthen the mind and improve the quality of your mental functioning.

Even the most mundane, everyday task can be transformed into a mindful activity that comes alive with newness, presence and power when you practice it with mindfulness. The secret is to place all your attention on what it is that you are doing. Be completely in the now.

Tips to help you develop mindfulness skills:

Step 1: Recognise brain chatter *Notice it without engaging with it, watch your thoughts as you would the shifting of the clouds, then let them go*

Step 2: Understand how your body responds in different situations. *Is your breathing different? What are you feeling? Where?*

Step 3: Posture - Observe your posture, change it and notice the impact *Deliberately lift the spine and let your head balance, develop a meditation position*

Step 4: Tension gathers often unconsciously in the body and mind. *Tense all your muscles, hold for the count of 3 and then release. Do this 3 times*

Step 5: Breathing –the most important skill is to learn breathing techniques. *Observe your breathing, is it fast or slow, deep or shallow, regular or irregular. Notice the touch of your breath on the tip of your nose, cool in breath and warm out breath. Say to yourself to your body's natural breathing rhythm 'I breathe in...I breathe out...'*

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Step 6: Time –Take time, you will be more effective if you do? With deliberate intention, relax and rest in the present moment, you will feel refreshed and renewed. *Take 3-5 minutes a day to practice your mindfulness with intent*

Step 7: Exercise – exercise is essential to your good health so do some whatever it is you like at the very least walk. *Take at least 5 minutes to walk outside, look at the sky, notice the seasons*

Step 8: Enjoy – everything you do add conscious breathing, being in the moment. *Notice the soap as you wash up, the bubbles and colour, feel the touch of the bubbles on your skin, notice the smell*

Step 9: Relax - into the moment, let your mind wander to simple natural things. *Read some uplifting quotes, a poem or prose, listen to some music*

Research has shown that meditation can contribute to an individual's psychological and physiological well-being. This is accomplished as meditation brings the brainwave pattern into an alpha state, which is a level of consciousness that promotes healing.

There is scientific evidence that regular meditation can help reduce blood pressure, boost the immune system, lower the incidence of strokes and heart disease, improve sleep patterns, and so on. Just about any form of meditation will have a generally beneficial effect on your health, but if you are suffering from a particular ailment, you may find it useful to practice a meditation technique specifically aimed at healing.

It is also recognized as a useful way to manage pain. Recent studies have proven that meditation for pain relief is a very powerful way to help relieve pain without the many side effects that are found in other methods of chemical drugs etc. Meditation for pain relief teaches the body to relax and to focus on things other than the present pain.