



Wellbeing with Fatigue

Booklet for Participants

Session 2. Emotions and LTHC. Managing stress and strong emotions. Healthy life style.

steps2wellbeing
Southampton & Dorset

Action Plan

- Home Practice Review
- LTHC and Mental Health Wellbeing
- Emotions and Illness
- Stress
- Healthy Living
- Coping with Strong Emotions
- Summary and Home Practice

Questions?

Do you have any questions from last week's session?



Home Practice Review

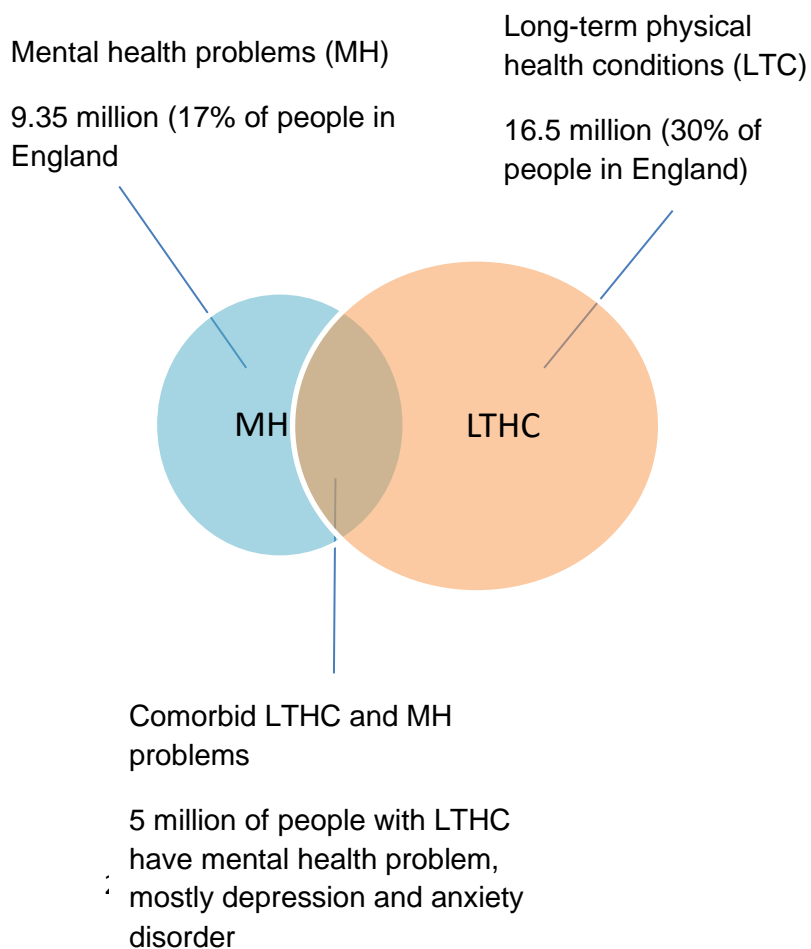
How did your home practice go? Did you achieve your goals?

What did you learn from your home practice?

LTHC and Mental Health Wellbeing

What people living with a long-term health condition might feel?

When someone lives with illness, they often feel emotional. This is true of heart problems, cancer, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome. Emotional reactions to illness vary. This is because it depends on whether we see our symptoms as overwhelming, frustrating, demoralising or just a nuisance. In addition, everyone reacts differently when it comes to emotions.



Bidirectional relationship between physical and mental health wellbeing

Both mental and physical health have a connection to each other. There is clear evidence that the presence of chronic illness noticeably increases the risk of a comorbid mental health problem and vice versa.

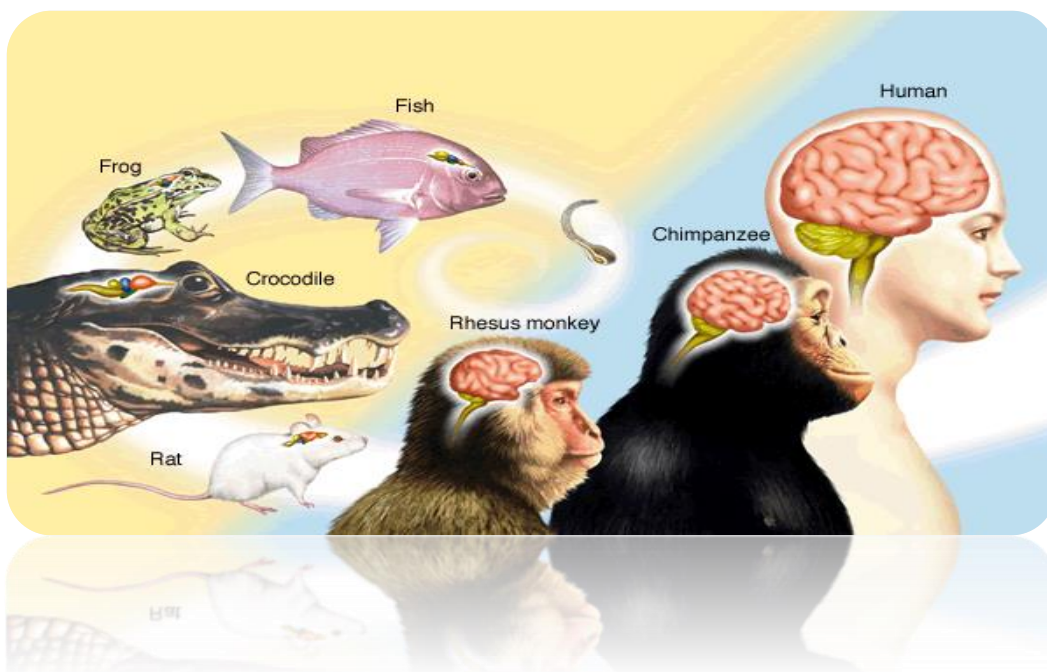
Faced with a diagnosis of illness, most people react initially with shock and disbelief, followed by anxiety, anger, and sadness. In the majority of cases, this stress reaction subsides within few weeks or months as people learn to come to terms with their conditions. However, some will develop persistent emotional disorders, e.g. depression or anxiety.

Emotional reactions to illness

The journey into a LTHC can shatter our ideas and beliefs about ourselves and our world.

Reconstructing our world's view and sense of self requires cognitive AND emotional processing. Sometimes the emotions can be overwhelming and threatening, and often we find it difficult to cope with strong emotions.

- Why do we experience emotions?
- What emotions might we experience?
- How might we respond to emotions?



The human brain is the product of many millions of years of evolution – a process of conserving, modifying and adapting. We have evolved emotions as ways of helping us to rapidly reorganise our mental and bodily resources to help us prepare for anything the world might throw at us.

The connection between the brain and the body

The nervous system is made up of the brain, the spinal cord and the peripheral nerves. The nervous system sends messages around the body through the nerves to tell the body what to do – move, breathe, change heart rate. The nerves also bring information back to the brain from the rest of the body and this tells the brain what the body is doing and what is happening around us. We know now that the nervous system controls many of the body's process, e.g. fight and flight and rest and digest responses.

The branches of Autonomic Nervous System



Sympathetic Nervous System

- Controls stimulation of **'fight and flight'** stress response
- Needed for short-term survival
- Stress

Parasympathetic Nervous System

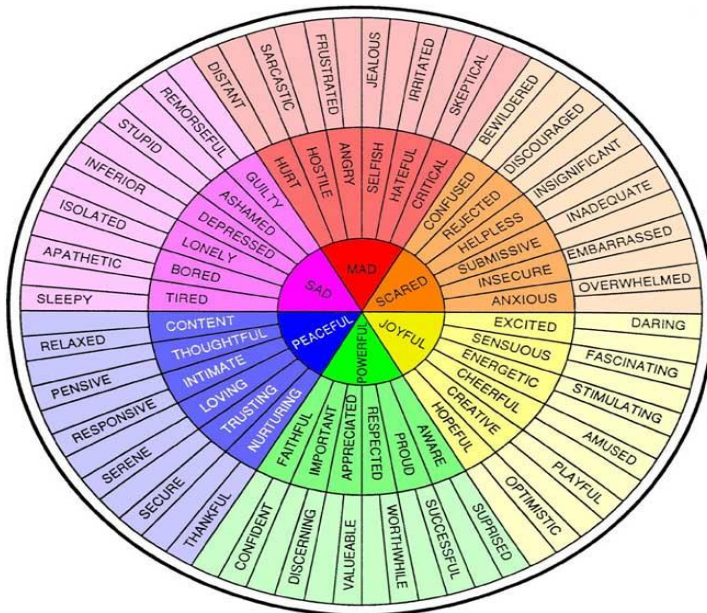
- Controls stimulation of **'rest and digest'** activities essential for recovery
- Needed for long-term survival
- Calm

Stress	Body System	Calm
Breathing is rapid and from the upper part of the chest	Breathing	Breathing is slow and from the lower part of the chest, using the diaphragm
The muscles become tense and ready for action	Muscle and joints	The muscles relax, taking pressure off the joints
The blood is directed to muscles and senses	Blood circulation	The blood is directed to the skin and digestive systems. This gives a feeling of warmth to the skin and improves digestion
The senses are highly alert, for example, the hearing is straining to pick up the slightest noise	Senses	The senses, such as sight and sound, reduce their attention. Sounds seem quieter and more distant
Digestion is "switched off" as the body prepares for action	Digestion	Digestion is "switched on". We may hear the intestines gurgling and feel hungry during or after rest periods
The brain is working over-time to make sure that we are aware of everything around us and to help us cope with any problems that may occur	Brain	Thoughts become unfocused and creative with a day dream quality

What emotions might we experience?

Sometimes it can be hard to identify our emotional feelings. The following **Feelings Wheel** may help.

- Start with the 6 emotions in the centre of the wheel- mad, scared, joyful, powerful, peaceful and sad.
- Look at the related emotions; for example someone feeling joyful could be feeling excited, sensuous, energetic, cheerful, creative or hopeful.



Common emotional reactions:

- **Stress and anxiety**
- **Sadness and depression**
- **Guilt**
- **Anger**

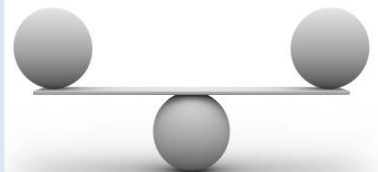
How might we respond to strong emotions?

Acceptance vs Avoidance / Denial

Expression vs Suppression

It is crucial to remember that these different emotions and our responses to them are all normal and understandable. They are not a sign of weakness or of failing to cope. They can all be helpful sometimes.

However, these emotions and our response to them can become problematic if they persist for a long time and become rigid. E.g. prolonged suppression of can prevent a successful coping with illness and other stressful situations because it prevents us from directly facing “the problem”, come up with a solution and acknowledge that our feelings are an important part of us.



Illness as a threat

Being diagnosed with a chronic condition such can be frightening and perplexing.

We can all be affected by stress. However, living with a long-term condition can make us particularly vulnerable. In addition to the everyday challenges that most people face, chronic illness adds new layers of stressors, e.g. the need to cope with pain and fatigue, the limitations that the condition puts on our lives, financial difficulties and the challenges of adapting to the self-care management of our condition.

What is stress?

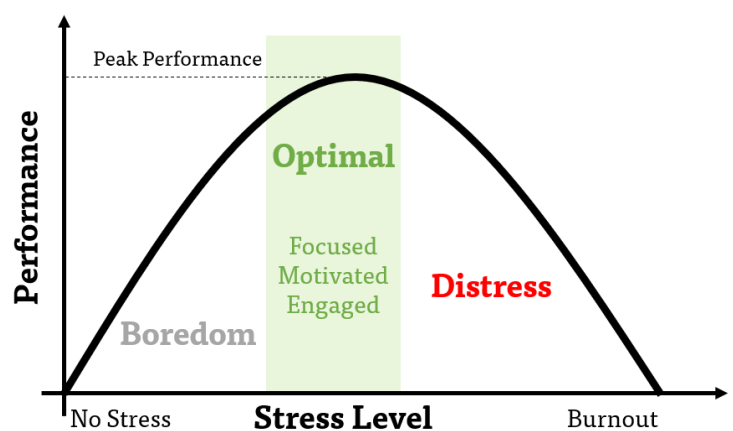
“Stress arises when individuals perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them or with threats to their wellbeing” Lazarus, (1966).

A certain level of stress can be helpful as it keeps you motivated and improves performance

At some point in our lives all of us will experience an overload of stress and how each one of us feels about it and manages it will be different.

Our bodies are designed to deal with short term stress via **the flight / fight response.**

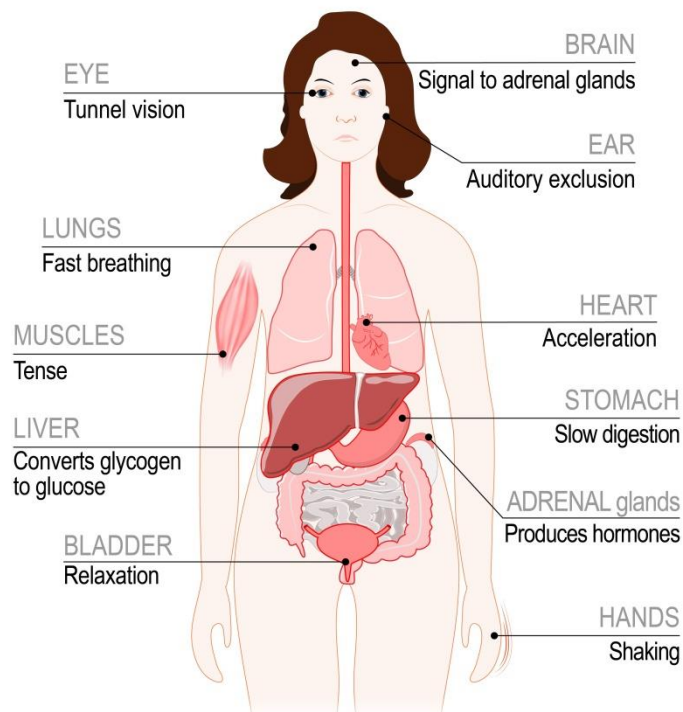
If stress is intense or continues for a long period of time without being addressed it can begin to impact on our physical and mental health.



The fight and flight adrenaline response

When the body senses a threat, the amygdala, an area deep in the brain that is concerned with our survival, becomes alerted and sends a message to our adrenal glands which produce adrenalin. This response prepares the body for action, protection and survival. Once the perceived threat has passed, our bodies return to a more relaxed state, however if the perceived threat remains (e.g. a bill to pay, health concerns, job or family pressures) the demands on the body are prolonged and our bodies are not yet well adapted for ongoing perceived threats.

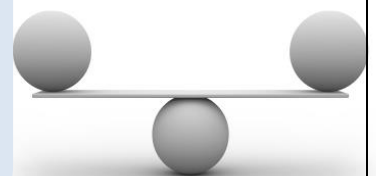
Fight-or-flight response



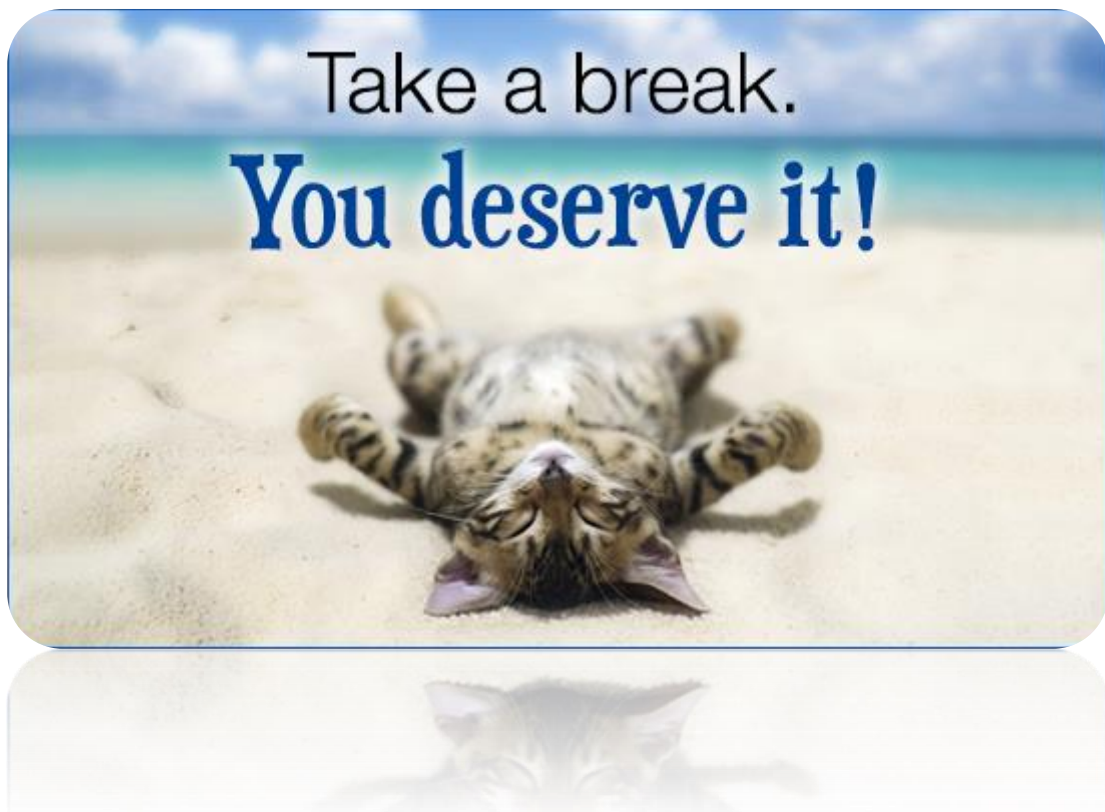
<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-stress-affects-your-brain-madhumita-murgia#review>

How does the body stop the stress reaction?

- The stress and rest & digest (relaxation) systems in the body balance each other. To stop the stress reaction, the body either tries to reduce the stress system activation or increase the activation of the relaxation system.
- We can learn how to actively stimulate the rest and digest system and find our 'individual balance.'



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Healthy Living

A balanced life style

An essential way to manage stress is to maintain healthy lifestyle habits. Learning to live a healthy lifestyle often brings additional benefits too, such as an endorphin rush, a release of frustration, a better physical health and added longevity. We can plan ahead and use the strategies below to reduce stress.



Healthy Diet

Eating healthily is not only good for us physically; it can be just as important for our mental health. Eating a balanced diet including slow release energy foods can be beneficial for regulating our energy levels and mood. The recommendations are to eat at regular times throughout the day. High sugar foods (ready meals, cereal bars, snacks) can cause spikes in our mood and maintain stress levels.

Exercise

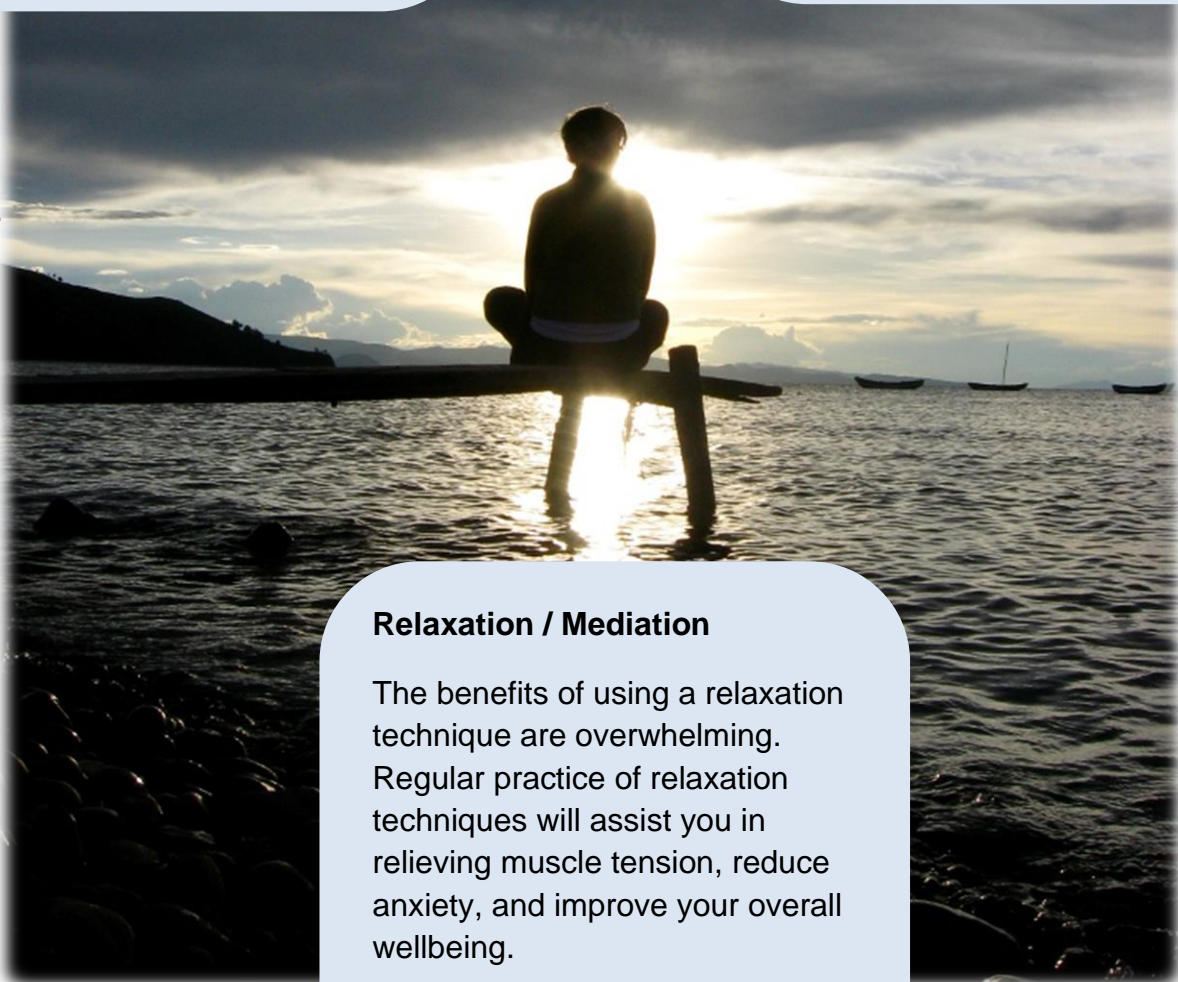
It has long been known that regular exercise is good for our physical health; however it can also be very good for our mental health. It can improve mood, reduce anxiety and improve concentration. Exercise has an effect on certain chemicals in the brain that affect our mood and can make us feel happier. Exercise also improves energy levels and improves sleep.

Alcohol

When we are stressed, in the short term alcohol appears to relieve symptoms of stress, but in the long-term, prolonged and excessive use of alcohol can lead to a whole host of problems. Alcohol is a depressant and when it is being processed in the days after drinking our body simulates the symptoms of anxiety – so it can also actually increase both feelings of depression and anxiety.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant; it can increase the heart rate and brain activity. Excessive amounts can create a 'high' feeling; however when caffeine leaves the body a 'low' feeling can quickly follow. Excessive amounts can cause physical symptoms similar to anxiety. Drinking caffeine can also cause sleep disturbance. Roughly more than 600mg of caffeine a day may cause problems.



Relaxation / Mediation

The benefits of using a relaxation technique are overwhelming. Regular practice of relaxation techniques will assist you in relieving muscle tension, reduce anxiety, and improve your overall wellbeing.

Meditation can help relief stress, break cycle of anxiety and unhappiness. Regular mediation practice has shown to exert a powerful influence on people's health and wellbeing.



Coping with strong emotions

Emotional avoidance

Feelings like anger and sadness often referred to as negative because they are unpleasant. However, there is nothing wrong with feeling bad – adversity is a part of life and getting through it can result in personal growth and better coping. Just like positive feelings, unpleasant negative feelings can inform us that something needs our attention and we need to take action of some sort. Sporadic emotional avoidance can be a positive coping strategy (e.g. distraction), but if we continually avoid acknowledging and facing negative emotions and the thoughts as well as the situations that lead to strong negative emotions we will get into trouble.

What are the pros and cons of avoiding emotions?

Pros of emotional avoidance

Cons of emotional avoidance

Accepting and processing negative thoughts and emotions can be difficult, especially during a time of crisis or when we struggle to come to terms with a long term stressor, e.g. chronic illness. But once we accept that they are just a part of being a living human being and that they can be useful, they can then help us deal with adverse live events, process the negative stressors and promote coping and personal growth. h

Tips for Using Negative Emotions Proactively

- **“Accepting” emotions**
Counting to 10 or taking a deep breath before acting on the feeling, or trying to avoid it
Saying “This is a normal feeling – there is nothing to wrong with feeling angry/sad/frightened”
Imagining that the emotion is like a wave, and we are a surfer who rides the wave until it has gone.
- **Mindfulness**; it a particular way of relating to emotions by accepting them without being immersed in them.

The breathing space with difficulty

Learning to create a breathing space in which to be present can be very useful if we are caught in the turmoil of emotional reactions to a chronic physical and/or mental health illness.

Three Stage Breathing Space with Difficulties by Dr Mike Scanlan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjsJcr4SHwI&feature=youtu.be>

Mindfulness in everyday life

Practicing mindfulness in everyday activities can create space to be more conscious what we are experiencing, and can help move us from worry and rumination into ‘here-and-now’ experience.



Paying attention to mundane activities exercise (based on ‘Waking Up to the Autopilot’ by Mark Williams in ‘Mindfulness. Finding Peace in a Frantic World’ 2011)

Choose one of the following and each day of the next week, and pay attention while doing it. You do not have to slow down or enjoy it. Simply do what you usually do, but see if you can be fully alert to it as you do so.

- Brushing your teeth
- Taking out rubbish
- Drinking tea, coffee, water.

Try this exercise with the same activity each day for this week. See what you notice. The idea is not to make you feel different, but simply allow a few moments in the day when you are “awake”.

Ask self and notice the following:

While brushing your teeth; where is my mind when I’m brushing my teeth? What can I notice?

Pay watchful attention to all the sensations – the toothbrush in relation to teeth, the flavour of toothpaste, and all the movements required to spit, etc.

Next week, feel free to continue the exercise with a different activity





Over to You : Choose and Practise

Summary Session Two

The key themes in session two included stress and different ways to manage it and our desire not to have and feel certain emotions.

We looked at how we can use acceptance and mindfulness to help us deal with strong negative emotions.

Write down one or more key points that you have learnt today:

Suggested Home Practice

You may find it useful to read this handbook, reflect upon your thoughts and the psychological techniques discussed.

You may wish to make SMART goals relating to lifestyle this week. The goals could focus on exercise, healthy eating, and relaxation or meditation practice.

Try practising Accepting Emotions or Mindfulness Practices.