

YMCA 2019

MANAGING STRESS WITH MINDFULNESS

YOGA ROOTS | MINDFULNESS FOR STRESS COURSE | JESSICA STEWART



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

'Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment.'

- Mindfulness is based on the idea that our behaviours and characteristics are not set in stone, but with practice, we can change how we react and respond to life.

This has been scientifically proven: "what you practice grows stronger."

- Mindfulness has been scientifically proven to reduce stress, negative thinking, depression, anger-management issues, addictive behaviours, drug-use and unhelpful behaviours.





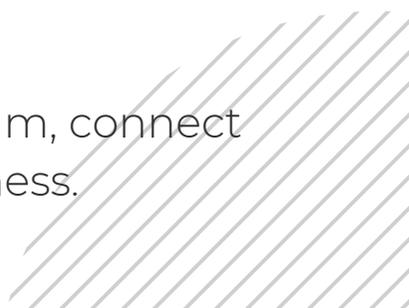
HOW DOES STRESS WORK?

'Stress is when the nervous system (which sits at the centre of the brain and communicates into the body through nerves) believes you are under threat.

Sometimes this is caused by a stressful event from your environment (an argument with somebody or a car speeding towards you) and sometimes this is caused by a memory, emotional reaction or a thought.

The stress response is a good thing - our breathing becoming shallow, getting hot and our heart racing is very useful if we need to run away from a lion. But is a problem if we get 'stuck' in the stress response and there is nothing to run away from.

In order to 'switch off' the stress response we need to 'switch on' the 'calm, connect and digest' response. We can make this happen by practicing mindfulness.



S.T.O.P

S. STOP & TAKE STOCK

When you next notice you are stressed. STOP what you are doing.
Name it: " I am feeling stress." Why? " I am feeling stressed because..."
" Try and name the situation and emotions without blaming anyone.

T. TAKE A BREATH

Open your arms, chest and stand or sit up straight. Relax your face
and take a BIG BREATH.

O. OPEN & OBSERVE

Instead of fighting (yourself or others) or reacting to the situation, try
to see the situation much more clearly. What else can you notice is
going on?

P. PROCEED WITH CALMNESS

Now you are in a position to respond by holding a sense of calmness
at the centre of your body, imagine a boundary around you
protecting you and communicate to yourself or others with
compassion and calmly.





THE SERENITY PRAYER

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference."

THE NEGATIVITY BIAS

Unfortunately human brains are twice as likely to notice & remember the negative as we are the positive things.

This was to keep us safe back when we were living in the wild. But nowadays it can make us feel isolated, stressed and depressed if we are only ever noticing and remembering the bad stuff.

If you are feeling anxious or down, take a moment to notice if you are focusing on something negative. Could you take a breath and let that go for a moment and come back to the present moment?

Mindfulness asks us to **THINK THREE POSITIVE THOUGHTS FOR EVERY NEGATIVE THOUGHT.**

Mindfulness asks us to remember to **TAKE IN THE GOOD** every day. Next time someone praises you or smiles at you, stop and notice it and let it sink in.

Try waking up and writing a 'gratitude list' of a few things you are grateful for every morning. Include a few things that you are grateful for about yourself too.





COMPASSION

Compassion is the ability to understand that we all experience suffering and that we can respond with love and kindness.

In mindfulness, it is most important that you begin to practice compassion towards yourself before others. When you begin to be kind to yourself no matter what, then you are likely to start to practice feeling compassion for others too.

Rather than run away from pain and suffering and stress, know that all things pass and don't last forever. Send love, kindness and a big hug inwards towards yourself like you are your own best friend.

When we are compassionate we can allow ourselves to be imperfect and make mistakes and see that this is normal and the way that we all learn and grow.

THE PRESENT MOMENT

Mindfulness can only take place in the present moment. When we go over the past or project or imagine the future, we are much more likely to get stressed.

We cannot solve ANY problems in the past or the future. We can only communicate, achieve and solve things in this moment now.

Sometimes it is painful to be in the moment that you are in. We want to hide or run away from it. But remember, you have the tools inside of you to stay strong and calm and get the help that you need.

It takes COURAGE & STRENGTH to stay present, even when life gets tough:

'Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.' ~ Goethe





ACCEPTING CHANGE

Mindfulness teaches us to see that life is constantly changing, that we are constantly changing.

This can make life feel uncertain and unstable, but it also means that all things that all events, feelings and thoughts will pass in time.

We are constantly growing and learning, and we don't ever really know what the future holds.

Quite a lot of stress is down to us wanting to control or change what is really going on.

Mindfulness teaches us to let go, and accept that we cannot change what happens, but we can change how we see and experience things. We can change how we react.

Sometimes all we need to do is 'climb up the mountain' in our minds and watch things happening and passing from a new perspective.

5 Mindfulness Practices you can try on your own

1. Ocean breath meditation
2. Count to 10 breath meditation
3. Affirmation meditation
4. Compassion meditation
5. Body scan meditation



1. Ocean breathing

Set a timer for 5-10 minutes. You may want to put on some 'sound of the waves' relaxation music from you tube or spotify quietly.

Sit upright on a chair with your legs uncrossed, or lie down on the floor or a bed with your arms and legs uncrossed and relaxed.

Close your eyes and relax your whole body.

Notice your natural breath.

Imagine you are lying on the beach and as you breathe in the waves come to the shore of the beach, and as you breathe out, the waves flow back to the ocean.

Thoughts may come and go, but when they do just gently come back to the feeling of your body relaxing and the imagining your breath like waves coming in and out of the body.





2. Count to 10

Sit upright in a chair with your legs uncrossed, or lie down on the bed or floor.

Relax your body, place your hands on your belly, close your eyes and begin to listen to your breathing.

You can feel the belly gently rise and fall with your breath.

As you breathe slowly in, call your inhalation 'one' in your mind.

As you breathe slowly out, call your exhalation 'two'.

As you breathe slowly in, call your inhalation 'three'... and so on until you reach 10.

If you lose count or get to 10, begin again at 1. Do this for as long as you need to feel calm again.



3. Affirmation meditation

An affirmation is a simply 'I am...!' positive statement. You can use any affirmation that you like, but here are two to get you started:

Stand, sit or lie so that the spine is long, upright yet your body is relaxed (you can do this anywhere - even waiting for the bus or walking down the road.

Notice your breathing coming and go-ing and gently swaying in your body.

Every time you take a breath say silently to yourself at least 10 times :

" I am calm and steady.' 'I am calm and steady.'....

or

'I am powerful and amazing.' 'I am powerful and amazing.'

4. Compassion meditation

Open and relax your body sitting, lying or walking.

Repeat this meditation in your mind as if you are talking first to yourself, then to someone that you know, then to all the people you don't know.

Eventually if you keep practicing this one, you will learn it off by heart and can do this meditation anywhere at any time... This meditation is a great way of opening your heart and letting go of anger. Repeat this as many times as you need.

"May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I be happy.

May you (picture someone specific) be filled with loving kindness.

May you be safe.

May you be peaceful and at ease.

May you be happy.

May they (think of all the people in the world) be filled with loving kindness.

May they be safe.

May they be peaceful and at ease.

May they be happy. "



5. Body scan



When everything just feels a bit too overwhelming and you can't shake off a feeling of stress and anxiety, lie down on the ground or on your bed.

Scan your awareness through your body. Start at the soles of your feet, let your heels feel heavy, feel your toes and ankles turn out as you relax.

Feel your legs, resting like heavy stones on the ground or bed. Relax your hips, your lower back and the whole lower body.

Bring your awareness to your belly. Notice how your belly gently rises and falls with your breath. Relax your ribs, feel the ribcage expanding as you breathe in, feel the rib cage drawing in towards your centre as you breathe out. Feel your chest rising and falling with your breath.

Relax your shoulder blades, your whole back, your arms, elbows and hands towards the ground. Relax your head so that the side of your neck softens. Relax your whole body until you feel held by the surface beneath you.

Inspirational quotes

'Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.' ~Thich Nhat Hanh

'Mindfulness is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience.' ~Jon Kabat Zin

'When you realise nothing is lacking, the whole world belongs to you.' ~Lao Tzu

'Be strong now, because things will get better. It may be stormy now, but it can't rain forever.' ~unknown