# **Being Mindful for Health and Wellbeing notes**

**What is stress?**

**The feeling of being under too much pressure, emotional/mental. Pressure turns into stress when we can't cope.**

**Causes: Life's demands, money, family, responsibilities, health, relationships, work…**

**Signs: Sleep problems, muscle pain, tummy ache, rashes, headaches, temper, tearful, anger, drinking more alcohol/smoking, comfort eating, loss of appetite…**

**Stress causes a surge of hormones resulting in flight/fight response. Constant stress means they don't return to healthy levels and may cause symptoms as above, as well as high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.**

**We can't always change a situation, but we can learn how to manage stress for our immediate and long term health and wellbeing.**

**6 Steps to improve Mental Wellbeing**

1. **Connect with families and friends – socialise**
2. **Be active – walk, cycle, garden, yoga, gym, for example**
3. **Keep learning new skills for confidence and achievement ie knitting, musical instrument, chess, sudoku, language, cooking …**
4. **Give to others. Small acts of kindness, kind words, donating to charity shop,**
5. **Get Creative. Dance, write, paint, express yourself through art, sing**
6. **Be Mindful. Mindfulness can give us perspective, allowing us to see things as they truly are. It is the intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of ones emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment.**

**Mindfulness**

Originally a Buddhist practice, mindfulness has been adopted by psychologists to alleviate a variety of mental and physical conditions, for example, OCD, anxiety, depression, addiction and stress. It can also be a helpful way of dealing with physical pain and trauma. It has proved so helpful that the UK government has recognised its value in schools and hospitals.

We often live in our thoughts of the future (rehearsing) or the the past (rehashing). Worrying about things that may or may not happen can be exhausting and stress building. Going over past events in our heads means we worry about things we cannot change. Learning to be ‘in the moment’ can give us the mental clarity to accept things as they are. Learn from the past and anticipate the future, but not at the expense of your present peace of mind.

**Autopilot**

We can all recall times when we’ve driven somewhere and can't recall details of the journey, or eaten whilst watching TV and not remembered each mouthful. To interrupt autopilot:

* **Stop – Take a breath – observe – the proceed**

You might do this before eating or turning the key in your car ignition.

Anytime you could do with a pause, **stop! The take 4 Breaths**

**“*Surrender to what is***

***Let go of what was***

***Have faith in what will be”***

**Techniques**

**Watching the Breath**

Perhaps the most important and easily accessible tool we have for mindfulness is our own breath. You could set a timer for 5 minutes to start with. Spend some time, sitting comfortably upright with eyes closed, to fully observe the sensations of your breath - it's temperature, quality, rhythm, pace. Don't judge, just witness without trying to change it. After a while, feel that the exhalation is releasing tension, anxiety and stress, and the inhalation is nourishing, bringing you vitality and positive energy.

If your mind is wandering,you feel stressed or are finding it hard to concentrate:

**Notice (or count) your breath – focus on a sound –and feel the ground supporting you.**

**Simple Movements**

Finger/ toe clenching – inhale to stretch, exhale to clench

Circle wrists/ ankles

Neck movements, hands on shoulders to circle elbows- inhale to lift, exhale to lower

**Recognise Mind Traps**

Avoid judging yourself or others, catastrophising or mind reading, guessing what someone else is thinking.

**Take 4 Breaths**

Standing – inhale raising arms, exhale to lower. To the front and sides. Encourages deeper breathing and brings a sense of calm focus.

Healing Breath for Protection: Stand with arms by your side and inhale, turn palms out as you exhale, bring arms up in a circle as you inhale, fingers meet at top, turn palms away and exhale to lower arms.

**Mini Mindful Moments**

Do each of these with complete attention for 30 seconds:

Look at something very small

Listen intently to a specific sound

Observe closely the feeling of touch – could be lips touching, hand on lap, touching an object, clothes or hair against skin, for example.

**Metta Meditation**

Metta is unconditional love. Versions of this can be found online if you'd like to practice at home. It is a powerful Buddhist meditation whereby you free yourself from any negative thoughts you may have about someone, whilst send them and you, and everyone else, loving kindness. Whilst sitting comfortably, close your eyes, focus on your breath, then take your awareness to your heart centre. Say these words to yourself:

*May I be Happy, May I be Well, May I be at Peace*

Then repeat this phrase for a loved one, acquaintance, someone you dislike, neighbours, people in the room, the whole world…… Then rest in the feelings of loving kindness and gratitude which may arise.

**Yoga Nidra (yoga sleep/deep relaxation)**

Again, many versions are available as a cd or online. It can be a very detailed and powerful practice, a fundamental part being the repetition at the start end end of a resolve. This phrase is personal to you, but here are two suggestions to inspire you:

*My needs are at the heart of my wellbeing*

*I am well, all is well, all will be well*

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