

Coping with worries: meditation and mindfulness



Guided Relaxation

Unlike distraction, meditation can be used as a 'time out' to fully relax both mentally and physically. A simple meditation exercise involves focusing on the present mental and physical sensations you are experiencing and allowing any thoughts to enter but then leave your mind without focusing on or responding to them in any way.

A simple meditation can take between 5 and 20 minutes (its best to start by aiming for a relatively short time) and if part of a daily routine can significantly reduce your stress levels.



Sit quietly and comfortably in a supportive chair



Either close your eyes or sit so that you are looking at something non distracting like a blank wall



Focus on yourself and your surroundings. Become aware of your body, of the physical position of your arms and legs, of your feet and hands. Notice the feel of your body pressing against the chair, of the muscles around your eyes and jaw; notice the feelings of your skin.



Become aware of your breathing. Follow a breath as it comes in through your nose, travels through your lungs, moves your stomach in and out and leaves in the opposite direction. Ride the waves of your breathing without attempting to alter it: just notice it and pay attention as it happens.



If your mind wanders and you find yourself thinking about your day to day worries, just notice that you have wandered off and bring yourself back and focus your attention on your body gently and without judgment.



After a time you choose, gradually stretch, focus on things beyond your body and get back to your normal routine, feeling relaxed and refreshed.

Being mindful



Worries can capture our attention and become a focus of our attention - driving negative emotions and behaviours. However, worries are not truths and should not be treated as such. They are experiences, much as sounds, sights and smells around us are experiences.

Mindfulness involves being aware of all these experiences - **living in the moment** - and not focusing on any one part of that experience. Rather than focusing on our worries (or actively trying to distract from them) worries are simply part of that experience, and no more important than smells, sights or other sensations we are having. Mindfulness involves being fully aware whilst not focussing on anything other than the present and not worrying about the future.

As an example, while walking down the street, you could be aware of:

how you are feeling - how tense are you (in your shoulders, arms, neck, etc), how cold or hot are you, are you walking quickly, how does it feel as your feet hit the ground, is it hard or soft, and so on ?

What is happening around you - what can you see, what are people doing and so on ?

By focusing on the totality of your experience, although you may be thinking worrisome thoughts, you are aware of them as a part of many other experiences - and because of this they are not the focus of your attention. And because of this, they do not have the emotional impact they would otherwise have.

Mindfulness requires consistent practice to learn, and is best learned in a gradual manner over a number of weeks. Luckily, there are many free or cheap apps that can be downloaded to your phone or computer. These include:

Headspace: meditation and sleep

Calm: meditation and sleep

Stop, breathe and think

Using these may take you a significant step closer to better mental health.



This information sheet has kindly been developed by Professor Paul Bennett and Dr Rachael Hunter, Swansea University



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