

# Daily Mindfulness

**Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) - when feeling stress and anxiety we often tense our muscles. PMR is a way of reducing that muscle tension.**

Have a relaxation phrase (such as “relax”) in mind while carrying out the strategy and remember not to use active tension on areas of your body that are injured. Consider skipping that injured muscle. Choose a space with minimum distractions and comfortable.

## Instructions

- Once you’ve set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
- When you begin doing the PMR sequence below begin by tensing the muscle group outlined. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tense for approximately 5 seconds.
- Relax the muscles and keep them relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like ‘relax’ as you relax the muscle.
- When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.
- Relaxation sequence

## Sequence for PMR

1. Right hand and forearm – make a fist with your right hand.
2. Right upper arm – tense your right forearm up to your shoulder to ‘make a muscle’.
3. Left hand and forearm – make a fist with your left hand.
4. Left upper arm – tense your left forearm up to your shoulder to ‘make a muscle’.
5. Forehead – raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. Eyes and cheeks – squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. Mouth and jaw – open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you’re yawning.
8. Neck – be careful as you tense these muscles, face forward, and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. Shoulders – tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. Shoulder blades/back – push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. Chest and stomach – breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. Hips and buttocks – squeeze your buttock muscles.
13. Right upper leg – tighten your right thigh.
14. Right lower leg – do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. Right foot – curl your toes downwards.
16. Left upper leg – repeat as for right upper leg.
17. Left lower leg – repeat as for right lower leg.
18. Left foot – repeat as for right foot.

# Daily Mindfulness

## Body scan - a quicker version of the PMR that focuses on different areas of the body

Body scans can be done anywhere as long as you are relaxed in the place you are sitting (easily done during an exam).

### Instructions

1. While sitting comfortably close your eyes, place your feet flat on the floor, and start taking some deep breaths.
2. As you exhale focus on your feet, see whether you can feel any sensation or tingling. You may wiggle or tense them.
3. Slowly move your focus from your feet and toes up your body noticing every part of the body and tense and relax that part. Do this for your feet, toes, ankles, knees, thighs, buttocks, lower back, arms, hands, fingers, right up to your head.
4. As you move up your body tense and relax the body parts.
5. If you find yourself wandering off, try to refocus on your body and breathing.
6. Finally notice the sensations of your whole body. When you are ready open your eyes.

## The five senses

The 5 senses exercise allows you to stop overthinking and allows us to ground ourselves and be present in the moment and more in control (easily done during an exam). It is a quick and easy way to bring you back to the present.

### Instructions

Activate your breathing. Take deep slow breaths and exhale. Do this for a few seconds.

1. Notice five things that you can see. Look around you and bring your attention to five things that you can see. Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.
2. Notice four things that you can feel. Bring awareness to four things that you are currently feeling, like the texture of your clothes, the feeling of the breeze on your skin, or the smooth surface of a table you are resting your hands on.
3. Notice three things you can hear. Take a moment to listen and note three things that you hear in the background. This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator, or the faint sounds of traffic from a nearby road.
4. Notice two things you can smell. Bring your awareness to smells that you usually filter out, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying a whiff of pine trees if you're outside, or the smell of a fast-food restaurant across the street.
5. Notice one thing you can taste. Focus on one thing that you can taste right now, at this moment. You can take a sip of a drink, chew a piece of gum, eat something, notice the current taste in your mouth, or even open your mouth to search the air for a taste.

# Daily Mindfulness

## Breathing Exercises.

The purpose of mindful breathing is to be present in the moment, so that you can let go of worrying about the past or the future. It has been known to reduce anxiety, help with burnout, provide certain types of pain relief, and decrease negative thinking.

### Three-minute breathing space

The three-minute breathing space is a quick exercise that is undertaken in three steps.

#### Instructions

1. The first minute is spent on answering the question, "how am I doing right now?" while focusing on the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that arise and trying to assign these words and phrases.
2. The second minute is spent on keeping awareness of your breathing.
3. The last minute is used for an expansion of attention from solely focusing on your breathing, to feeling physical sensations and how they affect the rest of the body.

### Mindful breath activity

#### Instructions

1. Start in a comfortable seated position. Be sure to sit upright, keeping your spine tall.
2. Inhale through your nose for four counts/seconds, letting your chest and belly expand.
3. Slowly exhale through your mouth for six counts/seconds.
4. Repeat for 5 to 10 minutes (or your preferred period of time).

### Alternate nostril breathing

#### Instructions

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Place left hand on left knee.
3. Lift right hand up toward nose.
4. Exhale completely and then use right thumb to close right nostril.
5. Inhale through left nostril and then close left nostril with your fingers.
6. Open right nostril and exhale through this side.
7. Inhale through right nostril and then close this nostril.
8. Open left nostril and exhale through left side.
9. This is one cycle.
10. Continue for up to 5 minutes.
11. Always complete the practice by finishing with an exhale on the left side.



# Self - Care

## Sleep hygiene - Keeping a regular sleep schedule is important to improve your sleep.

Sleep hygiene refers to having good sleep habits or pre bed/sleeping habits. Many things can affect how you sleep, what happened during your day, the food and drink you have and activities you carry out prior to going to bed.

### Ideas to improve your sleep:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule - try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time.
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine - have a warm shower bath, do some gentle stretches, do some mindfulness/mediation exercises, listen to relaxing music, read a book (avoid any activity that over-stimulates).
- Turn off electronic devices before falling to sleep. Devices let out blue light that reduce the chemical that controls sleep/wake cycles. The light from devices can also keep you alert.
- Exercise regularly during the day. 30 minutes of movement is recommended.
- Try to have no or little caffeine later in the day.
- Your sleep environment should be comfortable and suit your needs. For example cool, dark, quiet room.
- Use your bed only for what it's intended for. Avoid using it for studying, working, watching TV, etc.
- Limit napping during the day or later in the afternoon. If you need to nap please keep it to 30 minutes or less.
- Manage your stress before going to bed.

Source: Sleep Hygiene Explained and 10 Tips for Better Sleep (healthline.com)

## Movement - is essential for both our physical and mental health

- Find a form of movement/exercise that you enjoy and that you can do regularly.
- Set yourself goals around your exercise/movement to keep you motivated.
- Use movement as a way to motivate other areas of your life, such as by moving I am energised for the rest of my day, able to focus better on school/work, more productive, etc.

Source: propel.com

## Self-compassion activity - we are more likely to be self-critical and yet compassionate to others such as friends.



There are many different activities you can do for self-compassion. Check out Self-Compassion.org and choose one that you can relate to. Find a couple of examples on following page.



# Self - Care

## 'Identify what you want' exercise.

We can often use criticism as a motivator, which isn't helpful, instead, we should aim to correct this way of thinking. Mindful Self-Compassion can help motivate us to achieve our goals.

### Instructions

1. You will need a pen and paper. Think about a specific goal or aim you've been wanting to achieve. This could be big or small: a school goal, an art goal, etc. How long have you wanted to achieve this goal? How many times have you started and stopped?
2. Think about the language, words, and tone you use when working towards this goal. How do you describe or think about yourself? How critical or positive is this language? Often, we think that being critical of ourselves will help motivate us to change, but this is rarely true.
3. Reflect on how the process of criticism makes you feel. Do you feel motivated or let down? Positive or deflated? Start seeing how this way of thinking makes you feel versus how you think it might make you feel.
4. Focus on flipping the language. Write down words or phrases that do make you feel motivated. With your goal or aim, think about why you want to achieve it, and write these out in positive affirmations with a focus on how good it can make you feel.
5. When you catch yourself being critical or overly judgmental about yourself, your goals, or your lack of achieving them, reflect on this exercise. Use self-compassion to start amending your thinking to be more compassionate and motivating.

## How would you treat a friend?' exercise.

Identifying how you would treat others, versus how you would treat yourself in a challenging situation. We often treat others better than ourselves; we are more supportive and kinder.

### Instructions

1. You will need a pen and paper. Think back to a time when a friend or loved one has been struggling in some way: perhaps through a big life change, a relationship break-up, or a health issue. If you can't recall a direct experience, try to envision someone close to you going through a difficult experience.
2. Next, ask yourself how you would respond. What would you say? How would you say it? What questions would you ask? What little gestures would you make to show your loved one you care? Write out what the best version of what you would do in this scenario.
3. Now think about a time when you have been in a similar situation or envision yourself in a similar situation. Write down what your immediate thoughts and feelings about yourself are in this situation. How do you talk to yourself? What words, language, and tone do you use to describe yourself in this scenario? How do you treat your thoughts, emotions, or your body?
4. Compare the two ways you react to one another. Do you notice any differences and what are they? What fears are being played out in how you treat yourself versus others? Why do you think this is?
5. On a new piece write out how you want to be treated. What words/gestures/behaviors do you need to feel more accepting and supportive of yourself when you experience difficulties? Use this to guide your mindfulness when reflecting on self-compassion.

# Positive Psychology

## Strengths & gifts

A great place to start is to reflect on your individual talents and strengths and consider how you can make a difference using them.

- Ask 5 people close to you to send in writing what they see are your top strengths. OR
- Identify a time when you were so absorbed in what you were doing, that it felt like time was standing still. Maybe you were writing a journal, gardening, solving puzzles, playing a musical instrument, gaming, etc. By entering a space when everything just flows helps identify that you are skillful or talented in that area.

## Acts of kindness

Kindness makes both the giver and the receiver of our kindness feel happier. It creates a sense of connection and trust.

- Consider a formal volunteering program in an area you are passionate about. OR
- Pick one person a day to show extra kindness to. OR
- Display random acts of kindness, i.e., paying for a stranger's coffee.

## Resilience - What is hope?

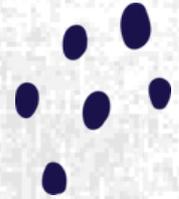
An important part of resilience is a general ability to remain hopeful. It can help you bounce back from life's difficulties when they do occur. Answering a series of questions (like those below), can help identify what we think hope is, how we experience hope and how we can bounce back after difficult situations.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- "Hope is a waking dream." (Aristotle) What do you feel this means to you, personally?
- Have your hopes changed during the last few years?
- How has being hopeful, or feeling hopeless, influenced choices you've made?
- Has anything happened to you that caused you to lose hope?
- What kind of things, people, or activities give you hope? Where do you feel your hope, or your hopelessness, comes from in life?
- In what ways do your surroundings give you more or less hope? How have they given you more or less hope in the past?
- What kinds of things need to occur for you to feel more hopeful about your life?

Reflect on your answers and see if there are areas in your life that create hope and those that maybe you might need to work on?

# Positive Psychology



## Find something funny

Humour has been identified to bring about positive psychology. Benefits of including daily humour activities in our lives to promote laughter reduce depression and increase joy even months later. (Wellenzohn, 2016).

Spend 10 minutes each day for 7 days on the following exercise:

1. Write down three of the funniest things you have experienced, seen, or heard that day. Provide detail and note how they made you feel. If you can't think of anything, do an online search for funny stories or anecdotes. Social media can be a good source for funny material.
2. Write down why you found each example to be funny. The more specific you are, the more effective the exercise will be.
3. Write these three funny things down at the end of your day. Doing so will foster a new habit and may help you to cope better with any emotion you might be experiencing. This will also help as you are going to sleep as you will feel happy.

## Gratitude

### Three good things

Positive emotions can help develop thoughts, actions, and attention to your surroundings. One example of this is to foster positive thoughts and emotions. (Barbara Fredrickson, 2009)

#### Instructions

- Consider ending your day by reflecting on and writing down 3 good things that happened today. These don't have to be big things, think about the small good things that happened today, such as seeing your friend, having nice weather etc.
- Be intentional about reflecting on the experiences, noting how you felt, and what was the best thing about the experience.

**Silver Lining** - Looking at the bright side of things is scientifically proven to enhance our resilience and decrease negative thinking, we are also more engaged (Sergant & Mongrain, 2014).

#### Instructions

Think about an upsetting experience you have had recently. It could be a small thing like "I missed the bus this morning". Rather than focusing on the frustration/negative of the experience, reflect on the positive things about it. Maybe it offered you time to have a chat with a friend on the phone you haven't seen for a while, or allowed you to see the sunrise from a different place, gave you time to reflect on the day ahead etc.