

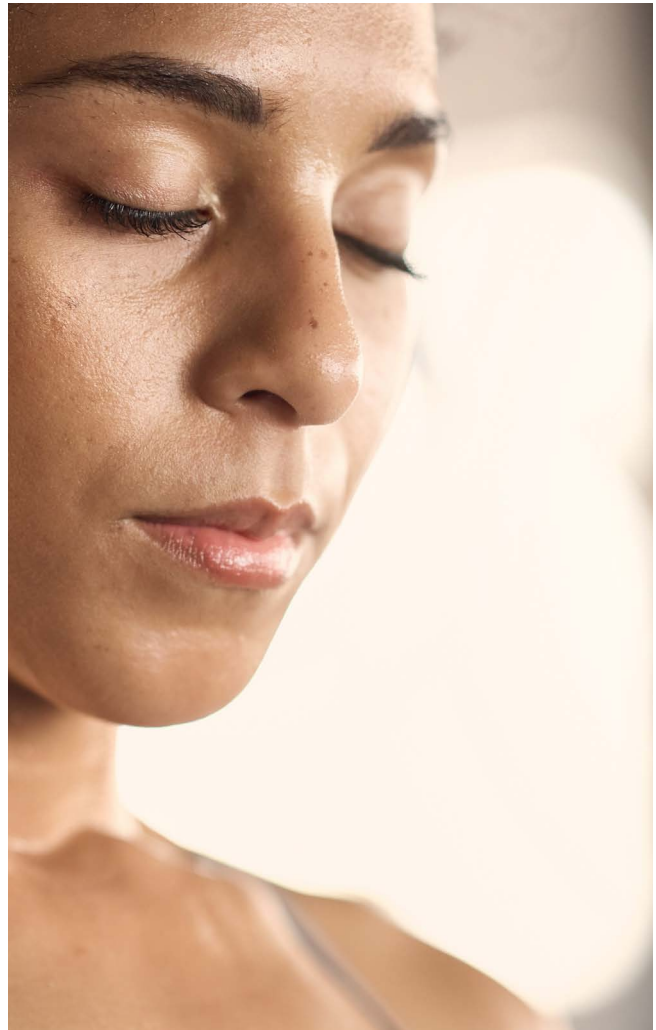
TIPSHEET

MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION STRATEGIES

The positive effects of mindfulness and meditation on mental health and wellbeing is now well established.

These techniques, which focus on cultivating an increased awareness of the present moment, have been found to reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, while improving mood, resilience, and focus. Studies show that consistent practice can lead to changes in brain structure and function, highlighting the potential for mindfulness and meditation to not only provide immediate relief, but also contribute to long-term mental health and wellbeing. Whether used alone or in conjunction with other strategies, mindfulness and meditation serve as valuable tools for maintaining mental wellness and enhancing overall quality of life!

The purpose of this **Mindfulness and Meditation Strategies Tipsheet** is to provide you with three practical exercises on how to actually do mindfulness and meditation that are easy to learn, and that you can incorporate into your daily life.



MINDFUL BREATHING

Effectively managing stress can include taking control of your thoughts and emotions to counter our innate “fight, flight or freeze” response. Resilient individuals are often mindful of managing their reactions and adjusting their physiological state when they are experiencing a difficult or stressful situation.

A simple and effective way of doing this is to take control of your **breathing**.

Whilst it may sound simplistic, conscious and controlled breathing is the only scientifically proven way to take control of your automatic stress response. In fact, by changing how we breathe we can subsequently change our body’s response to stress, how stress affects our body, and then how we think, feel and behave in response to difficulties!

Here is a simple and effective controlled breathing technique that you can use anytime, anywhere to manage your stress response.

It’s called the 5X5X5 Breathing Technique. It is a deep and controlled breathing technique where you slowly, rhythmically and methodically count your breathing as you inhale for a count of 5, hold for a count of 5, and then exhale for a count of 5, and you do that 5 times. That’s it!

1. **First**, make sure you are in a comfortable position with your spine reasonably straight. You can keep your eyes open or if you feel comfortable to, go ahead and close them.
2. Bring your attention to your breathing.
3. Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the outbreath.
4. Then, start by breathing in for a slow count of 5.
5. And hold for a slow count of 5.
6. Then exhale for a count of 5.
7. **Inhale for 5... hold for 5... exhale for 5...**
8. Thoughts will come into your mind, and that’s okay, because that’s just what the human mind does.
9. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.
10. You can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
11. **Inhale for 5... hold for 5... exhale for 5...**
12. You don’t have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don’t judge yourself for having them, or analyse them in any way.
13. It’s okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
14. Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.
15. Keep at the 5X5X5 method until you are ready to return back to your normal breathing.
16. Slowly, **Inhale for 5... hold for 5... exhale for 5...**
17. Start to bring your attention back to your surroundings, and open your eyes (if they were closed).

MINDFUL OBSERVATION

Mindfulness is the awareness of, and complete immersion in the present moment without judgement. But for many people, mindfulness sounds like a wonderful idea but too impractical and perhaps too abstract or outlandish of a concept, but it doesn't have to be wishy washy or impractical!

Here is a 2-minute activity to give a go and start developing mindfulness!

1. Close your eyes, take three long slow, deep breaths and make yourself comfortable.
2. Notice any thoughts that you have and then let them float away – as if on a passing cloud.
3. Notice any sounds you hear, smells, or bodily sensations that you are aware of.
4. Notice any emotions that arise. Simply give them short labels such as “that’s a sad feeling”, “that’s an angry feeling” and then just allow them to float away.
5. Attend to your breathing, take in your surroundings, and focus on what you are currently doing.
6. As your thoughts drift to other things – gently return to attending to your breathing, taking in your surroundings and focusing on what you are currently doing.
7. After two minutes – return back to your environment.

GRATITUDE MEDITATION

In this practice, you focus on things that you're grateful for. This cultivates a positive mindset and can significantly improve mental wellbeing.

Only got 1 minute? Give this activity a go and start developing mindfulness!

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit or stand.
2. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in, and slowly exhale.
3. Bring your attention to the present moment, letting go of any thoughts or distractions.
4. Take a moment to reflect on something you are grateful for in your life. It could be a person, a situation, or something simple like a beautiful sunrise.
5. As you focus on this gratitude, feel it deeply in your heart and allow it to fill you with appreciation. Imagine a small dot of sunlight in your stomach and let it grow and swell to fill you with warmth and light.
6. Take another deep breath in, and as you exhale, express a silent or whispered “thank you” for this amazing thing in your life.
7. Allow yourself to fully embody the feeling of gratitude for a few more seconds.
8. When you're ready, gently open your eyes and carry this sense of gratitude with you throughout your day.

Remember, even a brief moment of gratitude can have a positive impact on your well-being.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Mindfulness and meditation practice is just like learning any new skill. It requires practice and patience to develop but then it can be used whenever you need it!
- Visit [Head to Health](#) for a range of free mindfulness and meditation resources.

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