

Depression

People who experience depression feel down or sad much of the time, or find that they lose interest or pleasure in things they used to enjoy. Additionally, someone who is depressed may notice changes in their eating, sleeping, and concentration, and may feel worthless or hopeless. When people are depressed, they may isolate themselves from other people because they have little energy or because they feel bad about themselves. Sometimes when people feel depressed, they may also experience suicidal thoughts, like "I don't want to go on anymore," or "I want to be dead." If you think that you might act on these thoughts, please seek professional counselling/support or call Lifeline on 131114. They will be able to help you to contact a trained professional to help you through this period. Remember, like other thoughts, *this will pass*.

Common Symptoms of Depression

- Persistent, sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including hanging out with friends, exercising, reading, and so forth
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Decreased energy or feelings of fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early morning awakening, or sleeping too much
- Weight loss or loss of appetite, or overeating and weight gain
- Restlessness, irritability, or agitation
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, muscle tension, and chronic pain
- Low self esteem
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

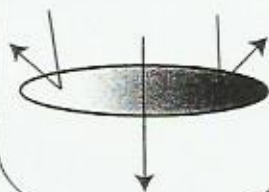
Over-generalising

"everything is always rubbish"

"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

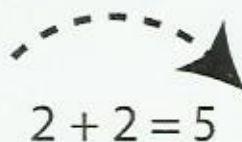
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot*

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

Statements:

INCORRECT

CORRECT

Instead of Saying:

Exchange With:

I have to do well.

I want to do well.

You shouldn't do that.

I prefer you not do that.

You never help me.

You rarely help me.

I can't stand my job.

I don't like my job.

You are a bad boy.

That behavior is undesirable.

I'm a loser.

I failed at this one task.

I need love.

I want love, but don't need it.

Emotional Vocabulary Exchange

REBT does not endeavor to eliminate emotions. Quite to the contrary! Emotions are very useful and part of the human advantage — When Appropriate!

INCORRECT

CORRECT

Instead of Saying:

Exchange With:

Anxious

Concerned

Depressed

Sad

Angry

Annoyed

Guilt

Remorse

Shame

Regret

Hurt

Disappointed

Jealous

Concern for my relationship

Generalised Anxiety

People who experience generalised anxiety excessively worry (apprehensive expectation) about a number of events or activities much of the time. Additionally, someone who is anxious finds it difficult to control the worry, and to keep worrisome thoughts from interfering with attention to tasks at hand. When people are anxious they often worry about everyday routine life circumstances, such as possible job responsibilities, health and finances, the health of family members, misfortune to their children, or minor matters (e.g., doing household chores, or being late for appointments). Many people with generalised anxiety also experience sweating, nausea, and diarrhoea, and an exaggerated startle response. Additionally, people may experience headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and stomach ulcers.

Common Symptoms of Generalised Anxiety

- Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep)
-

* Other anxiety disorders include Separation Anxiety, Specific Phobia, Social Anxiety, Panic Attacks, and Agoraphobia.

What Is Mindfulness?

Living in the moment

Mindfulness is living in the now. It is essentially about being more aware and awake in every moment of your life. It is about intentionally paying attention to each moment, being fully engaged in whatever is happening around you and within you. It involves bringing an attitude of curiosity, acceptance and friendliness to whatever is experienced, rather than habitual patterns of judgment and criticism.

Default mode

Research shows that when we are not deliberately paying attention to something, our brain clicks off into Default Mode. This is a type of attention characterised by mental chatter, mind wandering, operating on 'automatic pilot', dwelling on the past and worrying about the future, judgment and criticism. Default mode has been found to activate specific areas of the brain, mostly in the temporal and parietal lobes, along with the hippocampus and certain prefrontal areas¹. The amygdala (the brain's "fear centre") also becomes overactivated². This activation pattern tends to result in experiencing the world through thoughts and ideas, rather than directly through the senses, and is increasingly being linked to mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, ADHD and even autism and schizophrenia³. It has also been associated with reduced cognitive functioning, and therefore impaired academic and occupational functioning⁴ as well as difficulty understanding others and communicating effectively⁴.

In contrast, when we pay deliberate attention to what we are doing, we engage different parts of the brain (primarily prefrontal regions such as the insula and anterior cingulate cortex⁵). We experience things directly, through the senses, and avoid getting caught up in worrying, dwelling, judging and fight/flight reactivity. We all experience this way of being at times – while exercising, playing music, being in nature, engaging in hobbies and spending times with loved ones, for instance. In these moments, we are effortlessly in the present, fully engaged in the senses and fully present.

Mindfulness as a practice

However, it is much easier to experience this mindful way of being when we are watching sunsets than when we are working our way through emails on Monday morning. At these times, mindfulness becomes a practice – we need to deliberately and intentionally focus our attention on the senses, and bring it back when it wanders off into default mode. Because of the neuroplastic nature of the brain, doing this repeatedly activates the prefrontal regions associated with being present, and these areas grow stronger. At the same time, the Default Mode areas become weaker. In this way, we literally rewire our brains to be present – and healthier and happier.

This is sometimes referred to as mindfulness "meditation". Meditation here refers to attention training, and with mindfulness we are learning to focus on the present moment via engaging with the senses. There is no particular state to be achieved other than being fully present. In addition, it is not necessary (nor possible, for that matter) to rid the mind of thoughts. The brain is an organ and its function is to think, and there is no way to stop this. However, mindfulness helps us engage fully with the present moment, notice when our attention wanders off, and gently return it to the present once again. So we keep having thoughts but don't get lost in them.

The bigger picture

Actually, mindfulness begins with learning to focus on the moment. But ultimately becomes about connecting with the awareness that is conscious of whatever we experience – that is, what is looking through your eyes and feeling through your skin right now. Once we learn to pay attention, we can start to discern both what we are aware of in each moment and what it is that is aware. Getting in touch with this awareness, we start to notice that while what it is aware of changes from moment to moment, the awareness itself remains unchanged. Furthermore, if we pay close attention to it we will notice that it has an innate quality of acceptance and openness to whatever is experienced. We get in touch with a space that is bigger than anything that we experience, and which is therefore able to hold it without being overwhelmed. And when we bring this open and accepting awareness to ourselves and others, we tend to act and relate with more compassion and care. We become gentler and kinder and our relationships start to change. And as we become able to sense this clear, open awareness in each moment, we become able to maintain emotional equilibrium in any situation.

¹ Buckner, R.L., Andrews-Hanna, J.R., Schacter, D.L. (2008). "The Brain's Default Network: Anatomy, Function, and Relevance to Disease". *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1124: 1–38

² Sheline, Y. I., Barch, D. M., Price, J. L., Rundle, M. M., Vaishnavi, S. N., Snyder, A. Z., ... & Raichle, M. E. (2009). The default mode network and self-referential processes in depression. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106(6), 1942-1947.

³ Broyd, S.J., Demanuele, C., Debener, S., Helps, S.K., James, C.J., & Sonuga-Barke, E.J. (2009). Default-mode brain dysfunction in mental disorders: a systematic review. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 33(3), 279-296.

⁴ Brewer, J.A., Worhunsky, P.D., Gray, J.R., Tang, Y.Y., Weber, J., & Kober, H. (2011). Meditation experience is associated with differences in default mode network activity and connectivity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(50), 20254-20259.

⁵ Mitchell, J. P., Banaji, M. R., & MacRae, C. N. (2005). The link between social cognition and self-referential thought in the medial prefrontal cortex. *Journal of cognitive neuroscience*, 17(8), 1306-1315.

⁶ Farb, N.A., Segal, Z.V., Mayberg, H., Bean, J., McKee, D., Fatima, Z., & Anderson, A.K. (2007). Attending to the present: mindfulness meditation reveals distinct neural modes of self-reference. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2(4), 313-322.

Simple Ways to Get Present

Take Ten Breaths

This is a simple exercise to center yourself and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

Drop Anchor

This is another simple exercise to center yourself and connect with the world around you. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

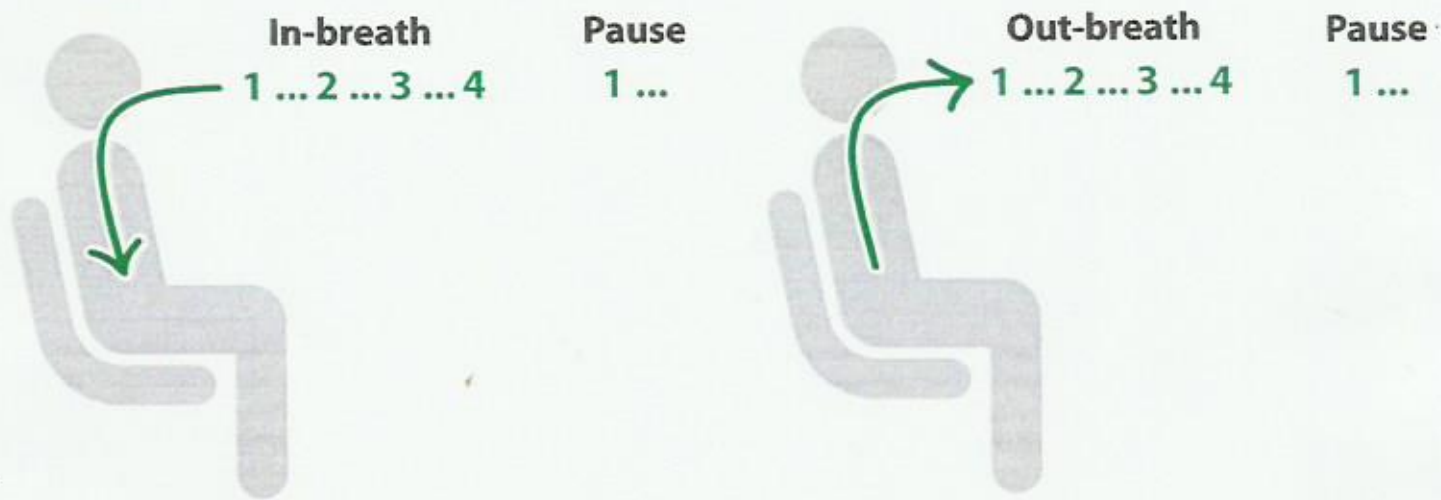
Notice Five Things

This is yet another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment.
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously.

Relaxed Breathing

When we are anxious or threatened our breathing speeds up in order to get our body ready for danger. Relaxed breathing (sometimes called abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing) signals the body that it is safe to relax. Relaxed breathing is *slower* and *deeper* than normal breathing, and it happens lower in the body (the belly rather than the chest).



How to do relaxed breathing

- To practice make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably
- Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so
- Try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth
- Deliberately slow your breathing down. Breathe in to a count of 4, pause for a moment, then breathe out to a count of four
- Make sure that your breaths are *smooth, steady, and continuous* - not jerky
- Pay particular attention to your out-breath - make sure it is smooth and steady

Am I doing it right? What should I be paying attention to?

- Relaxed breathing should be low down in the abdomen (belly), and not high in the chest. You can check this by putting one hand on your stomach and one on your chest. Try to keep the top hand still, your breathing should only move the bottom hand
- Focus your attention on your breath - some people find it helpful to count in their head to begin with ("In ... two ... three ... four ... pause ... Out ... two ... three ... four ... pause ...")

How long and how often?

- Try breathing in a relaxed way for at least a few minutes at a time - it might take a few minutes for you to notice an effect. If you are comfortable, aim for 5-10 minutes
- Try to practice regularly - perhaps three times a day

Variations and troubleshooting

- Find a slow breathing rhythm that is comfortable for you. Counting to 4 isn't an absolute rule. Try 3 or 5. The important thing is that the breathing is slow and steady
- Some people find the sensation of relaxing to be unusual or uncomfortable at first but this normally passes with practice. Do persist and keep practising

Fight Or Flight Response

When faced with a life-threatening danger it often makes sense to run away or, if that is not possible, to fight. The *fight or flight response* is an *automatic* survival mechanism which prepares the body to take these actions. All of the body sensations produced are happening for good reasons – to prepare your body to run away or fight – but may be experienced as uncomfortable when you do not know why they are happening.

Thoughts racing

Quicker thinking helps us to evaluate danger and make rapid decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger (or escape routes) when the fight or flight response is active

If we don't exercise (e.g. run away or fight) to use up the extra oxygen then we can quickly start to feel dizzy or lightheaded

Dizzy or lightheaded

Changes to vision

Vision can become acute so that more attention can be paid to danger. You might notice 'tunnel vision', or vision becoming 'sharper'

Breathing becomes quicker and shallower

Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles. This makes the body more able to fight or run away

Dry mouth

The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations as energy is diverted towards the muscles

Adrenal glands release adrenaline

The adrenaline quickly signals other parts of the body to get ready to respond to danger

Heart beats faster

A faster heart beat feeds more blood to the muscles and enhances your ability to run away or fight

Bladder urgency

Muscles in the bladder sometimes relax in response to extreme stress

Nausea and 'butterflies' in the stomach

Blood is diverted away from the digestive system which can lead to feelings of nausea or 'butterflies'

Palms become sweaty

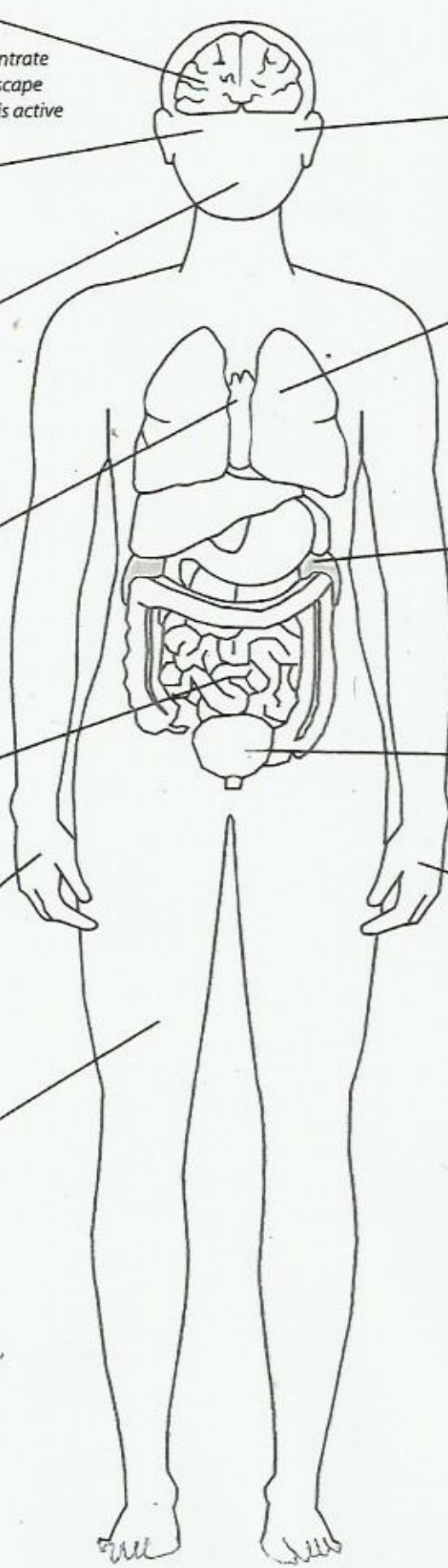
When in danger the body sweats to keep cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive a dangerous event

Hands get cold

Blood vessels in the skin contract to force blood towards major muscle groups

Muscles tense

Muscles all over the body tense in order to get you ready to run away or fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble, particularly if you stay still, as a way of staying 'ready for action'



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body.

In a progressive muscle relaxation each muscle group is tensed in turn, and the tension is then released. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.

Relaxation should be enjoyable so if any part of the exercise is too difficult skip it for the moment. If you have any injuries you may wish to leave out that part of the exercise.

Preparation

Lie down flat on your back, on a firm bed, a couch, or on the floor. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion. Alternatively sit in a comfortable chair with your head well-supported. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

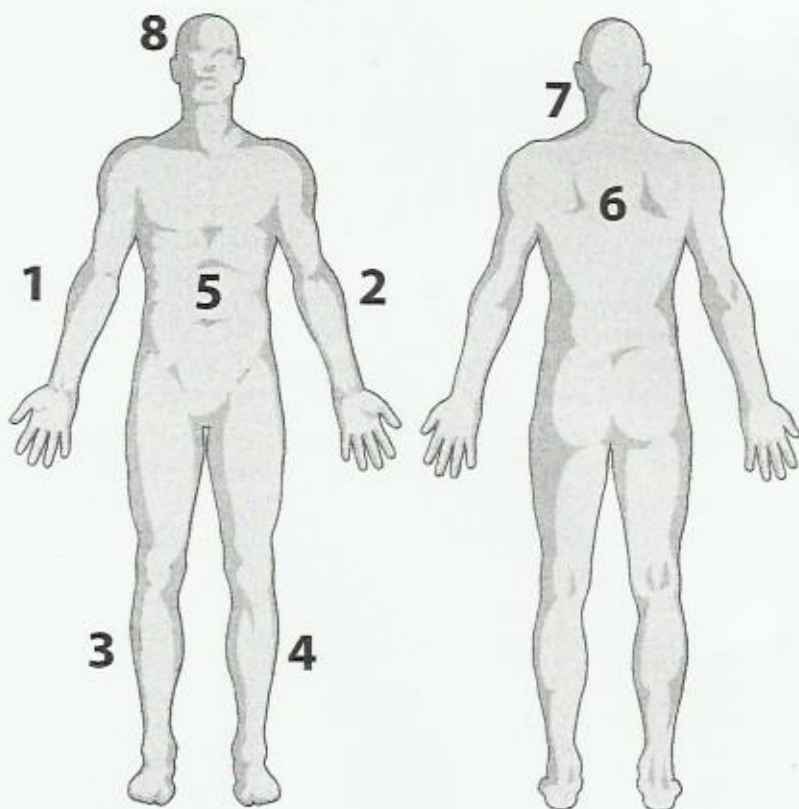
Instructions

Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. Go through the sequence three times:

- 1) *Tense & release: Tense that body part, hold it for a few moments, then relax*
- 2) *Lightly tense & release: Tense that body part with just enough tension to notice, then relax*
- 3) *Release only: Just pay attention to each muscle group and decide to relax it*

Recommended sequence

- 1 Right hand & arm
(clench the fist & tighten the muscles in the arm)
- 2 Left hand & arm
- 3 Right leg
(tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly)
- 4 Left leg
- 5 Stomach & chest
- 6 Back muscles
(pull the shoulders back slightly)
- 7 Neck & throat
(push the head back slightly into the pillow/surface)
- 8 Face
(scrunch up the muscles in your face)



Exchange Vocabulary

(c) By: Robert F. Sarmiento, Ph.d.



Upset feelings are usually caused by the way we are thinking about what is happening, not the events themselves. To change your feelings (and your behavior), try the following "exchange vocabulary." This idea was given to me by a client, who related it to an exchange list for unhealthy foods. When you first try this new way of thinking, it might not feel right. The more you do it, however, the more natural these realistic beliefs will become. I think you will like the results, but prove it for yourself by giving it a fair try. Good luck!

Word Exchange Table

INCORRECT

CORRECT

Instead of thinking:

Try thinking:

Must

Prefer

Should

Choose To

Have To

Want

Can't

Choose Not To

Ought

Had Better

All

Many

Always

Often

Can't Stand

Don't Like

Awful

Highly Undesirable

Bad Person

Bad Behavior

I am a Failure

I Failed At

But

And.