

Mindfulness Micro Exercises

Mindfulness is a way of paying open attention to the present moment, on purpose and without external interference, judgement or criticism. It involves bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment to moment basis. Research has consistently demonstrated that Mindfulness can contribute to enhanced emotional resilience, lower levels of depression and anxiety, improved working memory and concentration skills, reduced worry and rumination, increased focus of attention and reduced physiological arousal.

You can practice mindfulness by simply paying close attention to daily tasks such as feeling the temperature of the water on your hands when washing up, by walking with a physical awareness of your legs and posture, or just using your five senses to tune into what you can see, smell, hear, feel and taste in the situation. You can also take five-ten minutes each day to try the following simple exercises or visit www.thinkcbt.com to find out about Mindfulness training programmes:

Abdominal Breathing

Abdominal breathing, sometimes called "Belly Breathing" is one of the first steps in beginning to relax the mind and body. This works by tuning into the natural rhythm of the breath. The immediate benefits of this breathing are that it quiets the mind, reduces distress and relaxes the body by balancing the nervous system. The long-term benefits are improved emotional control, enhanced perceptual sensitivity and increased mental clarity. Practice this exercise twice daily:

- Sit quietly and comfortably in a chair, settle in, and feel the sense of gravity running down your spine and into your pelvic bones.
- Lengthen your spine. Lift, release, and relax your shoulders.
- Feel your feet flat on the floor.
- Place your hands on your belly.
- Tune into the natural rhythm of the breath.
- Follow the gentle rise and fall of the breath.
- Let the belly rise on the in breath and fall on the out breath.
- Allow the sides of your rib cage to gently expand and contract with each breath.
- Allow the breath to flow in and out by itself.
- Let go of any tension on the out breath.
- Remember that every out breath is an opportunity to let go and relax.
- Enjoy the feeling of emotional release and physical calmness.

Aware Breathing

Breath-awareness improves the ability to reduce stress and improve emotional resilience. When we are centred during breath-awareness, we are open and receptive to our feelings. Practice the following steps:

- Begin by bringing attention to the feeling of the breath.
- Feel the breath as it flows in and out of the nostrils.
- Notice there is a slight sensation of coolness on the inhalation.
- Notice a slight sensation of warmth on the exhalation.
- Allow your breathing to be even and relaxed; maintaining an even breath.
- As your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the breath.
- Breathe comfortably in and out through the nostrils.
- Throughout the practice of breathing, become aware of sensations in your body.
- Stay with these observations with openness and curiosity.
- Notice when your thoughts wander and come back to your breath.
- Enjoy the sensation of breathing with awareness.

The Five-Minute Daily Recharge Practice

Find a place of quiet and silence and then lie down and get comfortable:

- Start with yawn breathing; open your jaw and make some fake yawns.
- Allow the mind to wander and relax.
- Let your eyes close and soften.
- Relax and do some soft belly breathing; notice the rise and fall of the belly as you relax.
- Let go of any tension in the body and worries in the mind with each out-breath.
- Shift your focus onto your senses, feeling your body move as you breathe.
- Shift or stretch your body.
- Shift from actively thinking to noticing thoughts, feelings or sensations.
- Notice the wave or rhythm of the breath.
- Allow gravity to hold you as you relax deeply.