

**Alternatives to  
stress, depression and anxiety**



# Contents

Introduction.....	2
What is stress? .....	3
What is depression? .....	5
What is anxiety? .....	7
Diet .....	9
Sleep .....	11
Social activities, hobbies and exercise.....	13
Work/life balance .....	16
Breathing .....	17
Relaxation exercises.....	23
Meditation .....	27
Mindfulness .....	28
Binaural beats.....	30
Yoga .....	31
Tai Chi .....	34
Massage .....	35
Smiling.....	38
Gratitude.....	39
Herbalism .....	40
Homeopathy .....	41
Counselling/Therapy .....	42
Reiki .....	43
Reflexology .....	44
Acupuncture .....	45
Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).....	46
Hypnotherapy .....	47
Aromatherapy .....	48
Hopi Ear Candles.....	49
Baoding balls .....	50
Spiritual exploration .....	51

## Introduction

Many people, when faced with the effects of stress, depression or anxiety, instinctively turn to conventional medical practitioners and the chemical medicines which they prescribe. For some, this may be a carefully-thought-out and rational choice from among several options; others are influenced by the fact that conventional (allopathic) medicine dominates Western culture, and they have been brought up to believe that a doctor is the first person to contact when addressing physical or emotional ailments. Some people are unaware of the wide range of natural, safe and effective alternatives which exist.



This booklet describes a range of techniques, exercises and complementary therapies, many of which you can practise yourself. The booklet also indicates where to find further information about these therapies.

In 2015, doctors began a campaign to reduce the use of prescriptions and medical interventions, including the use of drugs for mental health problems. In a similar move, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges signed up to the international 'Choosing Wisely' campaign which aims to curb use of unnecessary medical interventions, and to reverse what it says is a trend to 'over medicalise' illness.

In 2018, the Health Secretary announced that GPs, pharmacists, hospitals and care homes may be making as many as 237 million errors a year (one mistake for every five drugs handed out). These errors, including incorrect dosages and patients receiving the wrong medicine, could be a factor in more than 22,000 deaths a year.

Government research and analysis (updated in September 2019) indicates that, whilst the prescribing of some medicines (e.g. benzodiazepines and opioids) has fallen, others are being prescribed more and for longer. This means more people are at risk of becoming addicted to them or having problems when they stop using them.

Chemical medicines are known to cause many serious side-effects and, whilst you may feel that the risk of these side effects is worth taking, consider the natural and safe alternatives described in this booklet.

The independent drug safety website <https://rxrisk.org/>, can help you weigh the benefits of any medication against its potential dangers.

If you are taking psychiatric drugs such as anti-depressants or anxiolytics, and are considering coming off them or reducing the dosage, you can find useful guidance here: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/medication-stopping-or-coming-off/alternatives-to-psychiatric-drugs/>.

Your body and your mind are your own, and it would be wrong for you to be coerced into any particular course of action when addressing physical or emotional problems.

Actuality Counselling is based in Liverpool and my services (counselling, coaching, counselling and organisational supervision, and EFT) are also available online. You can find further information at [www.actualitycounselling.co.uk](http://www.actualitycounselling.co.uk).

**Stephen Manning (Actuality Counselling)**

**August 2020**

## What is stress?

We all experience stress. It can occur in many different situations and when faced with significant life changes including:

- bereavement;
- moving house;
- changing job;
- relationship problems;
- financial difficulties;
- difficult social conditions (e.g. unemployment, poor housing, noisy neighbours); and
- difficulties at work (e.g. being bullied, facing unrealistic targets, working in adverse environments etc.).

Although there is a positive side to stress and, up to a point, it can be good for us (helping with creativity, learning, motivation and survival), when the level of stress becomes overwhelming, we need to take action to deal with it.



Stress means different things to different people: a situation that is intolerable to one person may be stimulating to another. Your experience is determined not only by external events but also by how you perceive and respond to them. Try to recognise your own responses to stress so that you can develop appropriate skills for dealing with them.

### *The physiology of stress*

In the animal world, the natural response to danger is to run away, to fight back or to freeze. People respond to emotional stress as if it were a physical threat, with rapid changes in the body's muscles and organs; these physical reactions are due to hormones that the body produces (including adrenalin) and, as a result, the following changes occur:

- muscles become tense and ready for action;
- the heart beats faster in order to carry blood to where it is most needed - the muscles and the brain (most blood vessels constrict but those in the heart, leg and arm muscles dilate);
- you breathe faster;
- the strength of skeletal muscles increases;
- you sweat more and your mouth becomes dry;
- blood clotting time decreases;
- heart rate increases;
- mental activity increases;
- sugar and fat levels increase;

- intestinal movement is reduced;
- tears and digestive secretions are inhibited;
- erection and vaginal lubrication is inhibited;
- the bladder relaxes; and
- the pupils dilate.

This automatic reaction to a threatening situation is known as the 'fight or flight' reaction. It equips us to fight, or escape from, an enemy. Even though you may only be stuck in a traffic jam, your body reacts as though you were gripped in a life-or-death struggle for survival.

### *How do you react to stress?*

Many people turn to cigarettes, alcohol or tranquillisers as a way of coping with stress; however, these short-term solutions may, in the longer term, undermine your wellbeing.

How you react to stress determines the relaxation technique that works best for you:

Stress Response	Symptoms	Relaxation Technique
<b>Over-excited</b>	You tend to become angry, agitated, or keyed up under stress.	You may respond best to techniques that quiet you down (e.g. meditation, deep breathing or guided imagery).
<b>Under-excited</b>	You tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced out under stress.	You may respond best to techniques that stimulate you and energise your nervous system (e.g. rhythmic exercise).
<b>Frozen</b> ( <i>both over-excited and under excited at the same time – like pressing on the brakes and accelerator simultaneously</i> )	You tend to freeze: speeding up in some ways and slowing down in others.	Your challenge is to identify relaxation techniques that provide both safety and stimulation to help you “reboot” your system. Techniques such as mindfulness walking or power yoga might work well for you.

## What is depression?

Depression can affect how you feel, behave and think. It can lead to emotional and physical problems, and can result in a constant feeling of sadness and a lack of motivation or engagement with life. People who experience depression sometimes find it difficult to go about their day-to-day activities, and may also feel that life is not worth living.

### *What are the different forms of depression?*

There are several types of depression:

- **Major depressive disorder (major depression)**

This can be very disabling and can prevent you from functioning normally. The symptoms include an inability to sleep, study, work, eat, and enjoy activities that once were pleasurable.

- **Dysthymic disorder (dysthymia)**

This is a milder form of chronic depression in which the symptoms may last for as long as a couple of years (often longer) but are not as severe as in major depression and are less likely to disable you. However, people affected by dysthymic disorder may still find it difficult to function normally.

Some people experience only one episode during their lifetime, while others may have recurrences.

- **Psychotic depression**

When severe depressive illness includes hallucinations, delusions and/or withdrawing from reality, this may indicate psychotic depression (also known as delusional depression).

- **Postpartum depression (Postnatal Depression - PND)**

This should not be confused with the mild depression which a mother may feel for a short period after giving birth. PND can start any time within a year of giving birth and can result in a major depressive episode within a few weeks of giving birth.

- **SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)**

This is much more common the further away you are from the equator and is caused by there being less sunlight and more dark hours. A person who develops a depressive illness during the winter months might have SAD.

Therapy can help people who are suffering with SAD. In addition, many GPs prescribe anti-depressants.

- **Bipolar disorder**

This type of depression (also known as manic-depressive illness) is not as common as major depression or dysthymia. People with bipolar disorder experience moments of extreme high moods and extreme low moods.

***What are the signs and symptoms of depression?***

Depression is not uniform: not everyone experiences the same signs and symptoms. The severity of the symptoms and how long they last depend on the individual person and the nature of the depression. The most common symptoms include:

- constant feelings of sadness, anxiety, and emptiness;
- a general feeling of pessimism;
- easily tearful;
- feeling hopeless;
- feeling restless or agitated;
- irritability;
- a loss of interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed;
- loss of interest in sex;
- lower levels of energy – fatigue;
- a sense of unreality;
- self-blame and guilt;
- difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions;
- disturbed sleep patterns (too little or too much);
- using tobacco, alcohol or other recreational drugs more than usual;
- altered eating habits (eating too much or no appetite);
- suicidal thoughts;
- a sense of isolation – difficulty relating to people;
- aches, pains, headaches, cramps and digestive problems.

***Treatment***

There are no instant solutions to depression but if you are able to take an active part in your treatment, it can help to improve your situation. Some of the alternative therapies described in this booklet may help you keep active, break the cycle of negativity, connect with other people and begin the process of caring for yourself.

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is normal and can arise as a result of a set of bodily functions that has been part of our physiology for a long time (see *The Physiology of Stress* on page 4). Anxiety affects different people in different ways and at different times. Sometimes, there is an identifiable cause: a traumatic incident, lots of stressors or a significant life event (moving house, getting divorced having surgery); however, there is often no identifiable cause for anxiety and this can make the experience even more distressful.

### *Symptoms of anxiety*

If you are anxious, you may imagine that things in your life are worse than they really are. People often think they are going mad or that their experiences are caused by some sort of psychological imbalance.

People often experience physical, psychological and behavioural symptoms when they feel anxious. Some of the most common physical symptoms of anxiety are:

- increased heart rate;
- increased muscle tension;
- “Jelly legs”;
- tingling in the hands and feet;
- hyperventilation (over-breathing);
- dizziness;
- difficulty breathing;
- using the toilet more often than usual;
- feeling sick;
- a tightness across the chest;
- tension headaches;
- hot flushes;
- increased perspiration;
- dry mouth;
- shaking;
- choking sensations;
- palpitations.

Some of the most common psychological symptoms of anxiety are:

- thinking that you may lose control and/or go “mad”;
- thinking that you might die;
- thinking that you may have a heart attack/be sick/faint/have a brain tumour;
- feeling that people are looking at you and observing your anxiety;
- feeling as though things are speeding up/slowing down;
- feeling detached from your environment and the people in it;
- feeling that you want to run away/escape from the situation;

- feeling on edge and alert to everything around you.

The most common thing that people do when they are anxious is to avoid the anxiety-provoking situation. This produces immediate relief but is only a short-term solution; the anxiety will probably return, with similar stress levels, when they next encounter the same, or similar, situation.

Some of the therapies described in this booklet may help you to overcome your anxiety or to cope with it more effectively.

## Diet

There is an increasing amount of scientific evidence to suggest that our diet has a strong influence on our physical health and our moods. Poor diet can be both a cause and a symptom of stress.

When we are stressed, we often pay less attention to what we eat: it may not seem important or we feel that there isn't enough time. However, it is important to make time for regular and nutritious food, and not to skip meals. Don't rush your food; take time to enjoy what you're eating.



### *How does food affect mood?*

There are many explanations for the relationship between food and mood. Some of the key factors include:

- fluctuations in blood sugar levels;
- brain chemicals (neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and acetylcholine);
- artificial chemicals in foods;
- deficiency of enzymes (e.g. lactase);
- hypersensitivity to certain foods; and
- low levels of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids.

### *Which foods affect which moods?*

Although further studies are required to establish a link between foods and moods, the foods that most often seem to cause problems are those containing alcohol, sugar, caffeine, chocolate, wheat (e.g. bread, biscuits, and cakes), dairy products (e.g. cheese), certain artificial additives (indicated by E numbers) and hydrogenated fats.

### *What to look for in your diet*

Consider your existing diet (perhaps keep a daily food and drink diary, for about one week). You may be surprised when you take a more objective view of what you eat.

Consider whether there is any one food or type of food that you eat nearly every day or in particularly large amounts? The basis of a healthy diet is about achieving a balance between a wide variety of foods, where the variety is spread out over a number of days. Certain foods are eaten on most days, by most people, perhaps because they are generally considered healthy to eat. Unfortunately, these can be the very foods that are having a negative impact on your health.

Vary your eating habits, making sure that you have a balance of protein (from meat, fish, nuts or cheese), starch (from bread, potatoes, pasta and rice) and fibre (cereal and wholemeal bread). Try to eat at least five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day (bananas, for example, contain a protein called tryptophan which converts to

serotonin; this can help you to fight depression, relax more and feel better; they also contain vitamin B6 which can help to fight stress). Also be aware of your intake of saturated fat (from dairy products), sugary foods and salt.

Often, it is a combination of eating too much of some foods and not enough of others that contributes to symptoms such as depression or anxiety. When making changes to your diet, it is essential to ensure that you include the nutrients which your body requires on a daily basis; if you cut down on one food you will usually need to substitute something similar. This may mean, for example, replacing wheat-based bread with bread made from rye flour.

You can find further information about the effect food has on mood and how to maintain a healthy and nutritious diet on the following websites:

[Food for the Brain](#)

[The British Nutrition Foundation](#)

[Mind Guide to Food and Mood](#)

## Sleep



The quality of our sleep is very important and can contribute towards a less stressful life. We spend about a third of our lives asleep; it is vital for maintaining good mental and physical health, and can help us to recover from mental as well as physical exertion.

As we sleep, our bodies and brains undergo a series of changes that enable the restoration of energy levels, the regeneration of tissues and the recalibration of connections in our brains. Different functions are restored and repaired by different stages of the sleep cycle; each is no more or less important than the others. The process is complex, and the wide-ranging benefits of a good night's sleep are only now beginning to be understood. But as the breadth of studies carried out in this field continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly apparent that all of our biological functions benefit from a good night's sleep.

The benefits we can expect from regularly obtaining eight hours' sleep include:

- Improved memory function
- Enhanced problem-solving skills
- Enhanced creativity
- Better decision making
- Strengthened immune system
- Improved heart health
- Maintenance of healthy bodyweight
- Better mood
- Greater productivity
- Enhanced athletic performance

Poor sleep increases the risk of poor health (including Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease). Sleep disturbances can be one of the first signs of distress and poor health can make it harder to sleep.

Common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression can often underpin sleep problems. Lethargy, tiredness, and disturbed sleep can be part of having a mental health problem or a side-effect of taking medication. Other risks associated with long-term sleep deprivation include but are not limited to:

- Increased risk of diabetes
- Reduced cognitive ability
- Anxiety and depression
- Weight gain and obesity
- Increased risk of cardiovascular diseases
- Weakened immunity
- Impaired coordination
- Premature ageing of skin
- Low sex drive

Up to a third of the population may suffer from insomnia (lack of sleep or poor quality sleep) or other sleep problems. These can affect mood, energy and concentration

levels, our relationships, and our ability to stay awake and function at work during the day. However, many people only need to make small lifestyle or attitude adjustments in order to improve the quality of their sleep.

The following suggestions may help you to sleep better.

- **Reduce screen time before bed:** Don't use your phone or computer, or watch television just before bedtime. Using these light-emitting devices prevents the brain from moving towards sleep gradually. You might try installing an app on your phone to reduce the amount of blue which is displayed; this can affect the amount of melatonin our bodies produce and can affect our circadian clocks (search for apps such as Twilight, Darker, Midnight, Night Screen, Dimly or My Eyes Protection). Also, try to avoid watching or listening to disturbing things such as the news or tense films. Read a book instead!
- **Exercise to enhance sleep:** Exercise in the morning or afternoon; this can help you to sleep more deeply and to dream sooner. However, avoid vigorous exercise just before bedtime as this can have the opposite effect.
- **Herbs:** valerian, mugwort, basil, chamomile and shatavari root.
- **Diet:** Soporific foods include warm milk, chamomile tea, turkey, bananas, potatoes, oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, tart cherry juice (or cherries), lemon balm, Saint John's Wort and catnip (it's not just for cats). Search online for more. Also, limit your intake of caffeine to the morning and early afternoon, reduce your use of nicotine and alcohol, and avoid eating big meals at night.
- **Visualization:** Use a self-directed meditative visualization technique to quiet the whirl of a racing mind (see the relaxation exercises on page 15).
- **Acupressure:** Try using these pressure points to help with [insomnia](#).
- **Bedroom:** Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive; use comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens that might affect you. Create a distraction-free sleeping environment that is suitably dark and cool.
- **Ritual:** Make time for a relaxing bedtime activity (e.g. listening to soothing music, meditating or taking a warm bath) before you go to sleep. Set an alarm to remind you when to sleep not when to wake up (it might sound strange but sleep scientists swear by it). Also, try to go to sleep and get up at the same time every day.

Look online for lots of other suggestions about how to get a good night's sleep.

## Social activities, hobbies and exercise

If you want to reduce stress, remember to have fun.

Making time for regular leisure activities can help you release tension and stress, and distract you from your worries. Whether you unwind by soaking in a hot bath, browsing through your favourite books, listening to music, gardening or taking photographs, the important point is to enjoy the activity as an end in itself, purely for the pleasure of the moment.

Perhaps it is time to ask yourself whether there are things you have always wanted to do, places you have always wanted to visit or experiences you always wanted to have but never made the effort.

### *Social activities*

A strong social support network can help you through difficult times. It can give you a sense of belonging, foster an increased sense of self-worth, provide you with a sense of security and leave you feeling cared-for and loved. You may not want to



talk to friends or family about everything that is going on in your life but at least having the option, occasionally, to offload can make a big difference. Keep in contact with friends, especially the ones who will make a positive contribution to your mood (friends who are, themselves, positive and who will encourage you, through example, to develop yourself, to be creative and to try new things).

### *Hobbies*

Hobbies can also reduce stress. Some examples include:

#### **Creative Crafts**

- Craft work (e.g. painting, knitting, home decoration, woodwork) can distract you from the pressure and stresses of everyday life and can give you a rewarding sense of creativity. One study of 30 female heart patients showed a significant decrease in heart rate, blood pressure and perspiration rate when the subjects completed a simple craft project.



#### **Gardening**

- Gardening gets you out in the fresh air; planting living things can bring satisfaction and peace of mind.

#### **Scrap books**

- Keeping a scrap book is a great hobby and is one way to preserve your photographs. It is a way to remember precious moments and people: looking back on fond memories of happy moments and people is a great way to relax and a sure way to reduce stress.

### Playing with puzzles

- Solving puzzles calls for great patience and brain power. After playing with puzzles, you tend to have a fresher mind and are in a better position to face your problems and worries.

### Keeping pets

- Looking after dogs, cats or other pets can be a great way to maintain a stress-free life. Unless you really dislike animals or are too busy to care for one properly, pets can provide excellent social support, stress relief and health benefits.



### Photography

- Photography can distract you from your daily problems and stress, and can enable you to express your feelings through creating visual images.

### Sports

- After a hard day at work, it can feel good to participate in fun, thrilling sports activities such as basketball, football, cycling, bowling etc. It takes your mind away from work, releases your frustration and provides an opportunity to socialise.



### Music

- Music is a powerful tool for relieving stress: it can sooth you, relieve tension and create a relaxation space at home.

### Short mini-holidays

- Holidays are a wonderfully fun (and sadly underused) stress relief resource. A short mini-vacation can “re-charge” you and enable you to return to work with a fresh mind, ready to take on further challenges.

### Reading

- Reading takes you into another world and gives you a vision of things you never dreamed possible. When you settle down with a good book, you can forget the rest of the world. Take time out to travel to distant worlds, learn about different time periods and expose yourself to out-of-this-world philosophies. Essentially, you are taking a vacation of the mind and this can help to reduce stress.



### Exercise

Regular exercise not only strengthens physical health, it can help you handle stress by:

- relaxing tense muscles;
- helping you sleep better; and
- releasing endorphins, adrenaline, serotonin and dopamine - chemicals that give you a sense of well-being.

Exercise allows you to forget your problems and leaves you feeling clearer and calmer. Not only do you become completely absorbed in what you are doing but the positive endorphins released by exercise help you to maintain a more positive outlook afterwards.

Do something you love. Any form of exercise or physical activity will increase your fitness and combat stress so make sure you are doing something that you enjoy; this will help to maintain your motivation.

If you have not been exercising until now, start off slowly! Don't throw yourself in at the deep end; you will be more likely to injure yourself and will feel less motivated as you won't enjoy the exercise. Build up your fitness levels gradually; perhaps start with 20-30 minutes and increase it over time.



You can find more information about exercise and how it helps to alleviate stress at [The Stress Management Society](http://www.thestressmanagementsociety.com).

<http://discoverahobby.com/> is an online community where you can discover new hobbies, learn how to get started and share your experiences and recommendations with others as they progress.

## Work/life balance



If you plan to incorporate more leisure activities into your daily routine, it might be worthwhile checking out your work/life balance. If the balance isn't right, you might find that your stress level can soar as a result of increased fatigue, less time with friends and family, and increased expectations (if you regularly work extra hours, you might find that you are given extra responsibilities).

Some of the signs of an unhealthy work-life balance include:

- feeling unhappy about the amount of time you devote to work;
- neglecting other aspects of your life because of work;
- feeling depressed, anxious or irritable;
- spending time outside work thinking or worrying about it;
- experiencing negative effects on your personal life (e.g. lack of personal development, physical and mental health problems, and poor relationships and poor home life).

Take personal responsibility for your work-life balance:

- Speak up when work expectations and demands are too much – make your employer aware of the pressures you are under.
- Try to 'work smart, not long'. Prioritise: allow yourself a certain amount of time per task and try to avoid being distracted by less productive activities (e.g. unstructured meetings).
- Make sure you have proper breaks at work (e.g. take at least half an hour for lunch and try to leave the workplace).
- Draw a line between work and leisure; if you do need to bring work home, try to ensure that you only work in a certain area of your home and can close the door on it.
- Try to ensure that exercise, leisure activities and friendships are not sacrificed to working longer hours, or try to ensure that you spend your spare time on these things.



Watch out for the cumulative effect of working long, stressful hours by keeping track of your working hours over a period of weeks or months (rather than days). If possible, assess your work-life balance with your colleagues and with the support and involvement of managerial staff and family. The more visible the process, the more likely it is to have an effect.

## Breathing



Probably the most basic physiological activity in which we are involved is breathing and yet rarely are we taught how to do it! Ask anyone if they know how to breathe and they will probably regard it as a very strange question: after all, it comes naturally - we just do it.

Abdominal breathing techniques, such as the ones described below, can soothe the nervous system and promote health benefits such as reduced blood pressure.

### *Breathing and stress*

Breathing is not exclusively about oxygen – it is also about carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>). The brain sets the breathing rate according to its levels of carbon dioxide rather than its oxygen levels.

When we are under stress, our breathing pattern changes. Typically, an anxious person takes small, shallow breaths, using their shoulders and their chest rather than their diaphragm to move air in and out of their lungs. This style of breathing removes too much carbon dioxide from the blood and upsets the body's balance of gases. Shallow over-breathing (hyperventilation) can prolong feelings of anxiety and stress by exacerbating physical symptoms of stress, including:

- tightness in the chest;
- constant fatigue;
- faintness and light-headedness;
- panic;
- headaches;
- heart palpitations;
- insomnia;
- muscular aches, twitches or stiffness;
- tingling, numb and cold hands and face.

CO<sup>2</sup> is a para hormone: it is not simply a waste product as previously believed but performs very important functions on its journey from mitochondria to lungs. It improves blood circulation by expanding the blood vessels and also affects the levels of beneficial nitric oxide in the blood.

We need CO<sup>2</sup> to benefit from the oxygen we inhale: the more CO<sup>2</sup> we have in our bloodstream, the easier it is for the oxygen to get to where it is needed. When we hyperventilate, the amount of CO<sup>2</sup> is reduced (when circulation to nerve fibres is affected and the capillaries contract, we are even more prone to experiencing pain and the body takes longer to repair itself); conversely, when we hold our breath, the amount of CO<sup>2</sup> increases and blood vessels expand, resulting in better blood circulation to the brain, arms, legs and digestive system.

Breathing techniques enable us to raise or lower the level of CO<sup>2</sup> in our bodies. An increased amount of CO<sup>2</sup> triggers a relaxation response in the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).

### ***The relaxation response***

When a person is relaxed, their breathing is nasal, slow, even and gentle. Mimicking this pattern seems to calm the autonomic nervous system which governs involuntary bodily functions. Physiological changes can include:

- lowered blood pressure and heart rate;
- reduced amounts of stress hormones;
- reduced lactic acid build-up in muscle tissue;
- balanced levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood;
- improved immune system functioning;
- increased physical energy;
- feelings of calm and wellbeing.

### ***Abdominal breathing***

There are various breathing techniques which aid relaxation. In essence, the aim is to shift from upper chest breathing to abdominal breathing. Find a quiet, relaxed environment where you will not be disturbed for 10-20 minutes. Set an alarm if you don't want to lose track of time.

You can check whether or not you are breathing properly by conducting a simple test. Sit comfortably and raise your ribcage to expand your chest. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. Pay attention to how your upper chest and abdomen are moving while you breathe. Concentrate on your breath and try to inhale and exhale gently through the nose. Your upper chest and stomach should remain still, allowing the diaphragm to work more efficiently. If your abdomen gently moves in and out while you breathe, you are breathing correctly.



Sit quietly and, with each breath, allow any tension in your body to slip away and enjoy the sensation of physical relaxation.

The first three breathing exercises below can be found on the website of Dr. Andrew Weil M.D. (<http://www.drweil.com/>).

### ***Exercise 1: The Stimulating Breath (also called the Bellows Breath)***

The Stimulating Breath is adapted from yoga; the aim of this technique is to raise vital energy and increase alertness.

- Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your in-breaths and out-breaths should be equal in duration but as short as possible. This is a noisy breathing exercise.

- Try for three in-and-out breath cycles per second; this produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows. Breathe normally after each cycle.
- Do not do this exercise for more than 15 seconds on your first try. Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath, you can increase your time by approximately five seconds until you reach a full minute.

When done properly, this exercise can result in you feeling invigorated, comparable to the heightened awareness you feel after a good workout. You should feel the effort at the back of the neck, the diaphragm, chest and abdomen. Try this exercise the next time you need an energy boost instead of reaching for a cup of coffee.

### ***Exercise 2: The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise***

This simple exercise takes very little time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, try sitting with your back straight while learning the exercise.

- Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there through the entire exercise (you will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward).
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose for a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a mental count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound for a mental count of **eight**.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important - the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice, you can slow down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more deeply.

The Relaxing Breath exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Try to do it at least twice a day (you cannot do it too frequently). Do not take more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice (later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths). If you feel a little lightheaded when you first try this, do not be concerned - it will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens (*before you react*), whenever you are aware of internal tension or to help you fall asleep.

### **Exercise 3: Breath Counting**

If you want to get a feel for this challenging work, try your hand at breath counting (a deceptively simple technique popular in Zen practice).

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and with your head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths; then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow but depth and rhythm may vary.

- To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale.
- The next time you exhale, count "two" and so on up to "five."
- Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than "five," and count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself counting up to some high numbers.

Try to do this exercise for at least 10 minutes.

### **Exercise 4: Pausing before in-breath**

This breathing exercise helps to improve our wellbeing by increasing the amount of CO<sup>2</sup> in our body.

- Breathe in and count your breath.
- Breathe out slowly and count your breath.
- Pause the breathe and rest before repeating with a calm and controlled in breath.

You might breathe in for a count of 6 and out for a count of 6, then pause on the out breath for 6 (use whatever count feels right for you).

### **Exercise 5: A breathing exercise to take you higher**

*This was published by Nick Polizzi on his blog at [www.thesacredscience.com](http://www.thesacredscience.com).*

#### **A warning before proceeding:**

*This type of breathwork should be avoided by anyone with a history of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, glaucoma, retinal detachment, aneurisms, significant recent physical injuries or surgery. Pregnant women should avoid this type of breathwork as well.*

*Keep in mind that, during the process, it is common to experience a wide spectrum of feelings, including deep relaxation, joy, serenity, sleep or meditative states, and possibly the release of past trauma.*

*With this in mind, it's strongly recommended that you have someone with you who is aware of what you are doing and is willing to assist if you need any help.*

*If you experience any overwhelming sensations it is OK to stop at any time.*

## The Practice:

Preparing your space: Find a firm, flat surface where you can lie down - a yoga mat on the floor is ideal. Many people also put a pillow under their head and a rolled blanket under their knees. An additional blanket can also be used for warmth if you become cold during the exercise.

**Important:** If this is your first time trying an exercise like this, it is strongly recommended that you do the exercise for a maximum of 20 minutes before gently bringing your breath back to normal and letting your body relax for 10 minutes while lying down.

This practice should be done with a partner who can supervise you. Take turns, at 20 minute intervals, one experiencing while the other holds space. Using a timer with a gentle sound is also recommended when trying this outside a workshop or class setting.

Read through, and familiarize yourself with, all of the steps below before starting.

- 1) Lie down on your back, with a pillow under the knees and any blankets positioned in a way that makes you comfortable. Close your eyes and relax your body, breathing for a few minutes.
- 2) Inhale slowly and deeply. Breathe gently all the way to the bottom of your lungs so that your stomach extends a bit. At the end of your inhale, immediately begin to exhale at the same speed. At the end of your exhale, immediately inhale again, slow and steady.
- 3) Be mindful of continuous, “circular” breathing (i.e. with no gaps between inhale and exhale) and be sure not to hold your breath. When your lungs are almost full, begin to exhale; then, before your lungs are empty, inhale again. Try to create a pattern of constant breathing, either in or out. Think about the breath as a circular motion in, through, and out of your system, and repeat.
- 4) Breathe a little bit faster than under normal circumstances. It is very important not to breathe so fast that you create tension anywhere in your body. The lungs and entire body should be as relaxed as possible. In this way, the breath cycle can be maintained for a longer period of time.
- 5) Inhaling and exhaling through the mouth will support emotional release more completely; however, if you find it more comfortable to breathe through your nose, that is OK. After about 10 minutes, your body will find its own rhythm and way of breathing. At about the 10-15 minute mark, you may begin to feel a tingling sensation in your extremities, a feeling of euphoria, or an “altered” state of awareness.
- 6) When your timer sounds (remember to set a peaceful alarm sound), your partner can gently put a hand on your shoulder to let you know that it’s time to slowly and intentionally bring your breath back to normal. Take some time in this in-between state to notice how what you’ve learned integrates and interacts with the reality that comes back into focus around you.

### ***Exercise 6: Long exhalations***

Since the PNS handles exhaling, try doing several long exhalations (e.g. inhale for a count of three, and exhale for a count of six). Relax your tongue and jaw, and open your lips slightly (this can help ease stressful thinking by reducing sub-vocalizations, the subtle, unconscious movements of the jaw and tongue often associated with mental speech).

### ***Exercise 7: Equal breathing***

For a minute or more, breathe in such a way that your inhalation and exhalation are equally long; count mentally up to five for each inhalation and each exhalation. This creates small but smooth changes in the interval between heartbeats - since the heart speeds up slightly with inhalation and slows down slightly with exhalation; this is associated with relaxation and well-being.

## Relaxation exercises

There are numerous relaxation techniques to help you balance your nervous system and encourage the relaxation response (a state which is **not** lying on the couch or sleeping but a mentally active process that leaves the body relaxed, calm, and focused). The following techniques are easy to learn. Try practicing them for 10-20 minutes a day (longer for even more stress relief). Many of them can be incorporated into your existing daily schedule:



- **If possible, schedule a set time to practice each day.** Set aside one or two periods each day. You may find it easier to stick with your practice if you do it first thing in the morning before other responsibilities get in the way.
- **Practice relaxation techniques while you're doing other things.** Meditate while commuting to work on a bus or train, or waiting for a dentist appointment. Try deep breathing while you're doing housework or mowing the lawn. Mindfulness walking can be done while exercising your dog, walking to your car, or climbing the stairs at work instead of using the elevator. Once you have learned techniques such as Tai Chi (see page 44), you can practice them in your office or in the park at lunchtime.
- **If you exercise, improve the relaxation benefits by adopting mindfulness** (see page 39). Instead of zoning out or staring at a TV while you exercise, try focusing your attention on your body. If you are resistance training, for example, focus on coordinating your breathing with your movements and pay attention to how your body feels as you raise and lower the weights.
- **Avoid practicing when you're sleepy.** These techniques can relax you so much that they can make you very sleepy, especially if it's close to bedtime. You will experience more benefit if you practice when you are fully awake and alert. Do not practice after eating a heavy meal or while using drugs, tobacco, or alcohol.
- Don't be discouraged if you skip a few days or even a few weeks. It happens. Just get started again and slowly build up your momentum.

### *Visualization*

Visualization (guided imagery) is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel safe and at peace - free to let go of all tension and anxiety.

Visualize whatever setting is most calming to you: a tropical beach, a favourite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, with a therapist, or as you listen to an audio recording which guides you through the imagery.



Find a quiet, relaxed place (beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up or standing).

Choose imagery that appeals to you and allow your own images to materialise. Close your eyes and allow your worries to drift away. Picture your restful place as vividly as you can using all your senses. For example, if you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake:

- Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colours and textures around you;
- Spend time exploring each of your senses;
- See the sun setting over the water;
- Hear the birds singing;
- Smell the pine trees;
- Feel the cool water on your bare feet;
- Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. Don't worry if you lose track of where you are - this is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle movements or you may cough or yawn (these, too, are normal responses). When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present.

### ***Progressive muscle relaxation***

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

- Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes and get comfortable.
- Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- When you are relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot: take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
- Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can and hold for a count of 10.
- Relax your right foot: focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- When you are ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscles as you go.



Start at the top of the head and work your way down to the tips of your toes, as follows:

1. Top of the head
2. Forehead
3. Temples
4. Eyebrows
5. Eyelids
6. Cheeks
7. Nose
8. Ears
9. Mouth
10. Jaw and chin
11. Neck
12. Shoulders
13. Upper back
14. Upper arms
15. Forearms
16. Wrist
17. Back of hand
18. Fingers
19. Lower back
20. Chest
21. Stomach
22. Abdomen
23. Hips
24. Thighs
25. Knees
26. Shins
27. Calves
28. Ankle
29. Foot
30. Toes

### ***Body scan meditation***

A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation - instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

- Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes open or closed. Focus on your breathing, allowing your abdomen to rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Breathe deeply for about two minutes, until you start to feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Notice any sensations. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and so on, gradually working your way up through your body. Pay close attention to any area of the body where you feel pain or discomfort.

- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to

### ***Controlling emotions***

- Stop for a moment and take five mindful breaths (ideally abdominal breathing, deep and slow).
- Recognize the emotion label on it (for example “Anxiety is here” – this is better than saying “I am anxious”).
- See *where* in your body the emotion is manifesting. Consciously “breathe through” that part, releasing the tension on every exhalation.

## Meditation

Practising meditation helps to make our mind calm and peaceful, and thus free from worries and mental discomfort. By training in meditation, we can become more and more peaceful, and can experience a purer form of happiness.



It can be difficult to control our mind, affected, as we are, by external circumstances. Meditation enables us to create an inner space and clarity that enables us to control our mind. Through systematic training in meditation, we can gradually develop mental equilibrium and a balanced mind that is more consistently happy, rather than an unbalanced mind that oscillates between the extremes of excitement and despondency.

There are two types of meditation - active and passive:

- The aim of all **passive meditation** techniques is to still the mind from wavering and distracting thoughts and gradually to focus on a single point. It is referred to as “passive” as it involves withdrawing ourselves in calm, sitting postures to achieve a meditative state that can help us in our active life.
- **Active meditation** relates to activities of everyday life such as walking, working, eating etc. The aim is to experience a meditative state in everyday life in order to increase performance and improve efficiency and energy. Active meditation draws on passive meditation is required and involves taking time out to be seated and perform meditation techniques or practices.

Meditation is not:

- **Contemplation:** Contemplation involves thinking about a concept, engaging your mind in enquiring about a certain idea. However, when you meditate, you don't ask the mind to think about a concept but go beyond thought.
- **Hypnosis or autosuggestion:** In hypnosis, a suggestion is made to the mind, there is an attempt to programme, manipulate or control the content of the mind. During meditation, you simply observe the mind and let it become quite and calm, exploring and experiencing the deeper levels of your being.
- **Identified with religion:** Meditation does not belong to any culture or religion. It is a method of exploring the inner dimensions of life. Although some religions employ meditative practices as part of their rituals, meditation itself is far removed from any set of beliefs or the distinctions of class or creed.
- **Instant peace.**

One particular form of meditation – Mindfulness – is described in the following section.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a particular form of meditation. It has been defined as the act of deliberately paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. Through Mindfulness exercises, we become aware of the full range of experience including sensory impressions, thoughts, imagery, emotions, urges and impulses (even becoming aware of the quality of Mindfulness itself), guiding our attention back to the present moment when our mind is distracted.

Thinking about the past (blaming and judging ourselves) or worrying about the future can often result in an overwhelming degree of stress. By staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance; by not judging either the content or the processes of your mind, you are free to observe them without identifying with the contents of your thoughts and can thus observe the stream-of-consciousness rather than getting caught up in it.

You may find practising Mindfulness is a useful way to achieve deep relaxation or to overcome stress and other discomforts.

Meditations that cultivate mindfulness have long been used to reduce overwhelming stress and can act as an effective alternative for anyone who prefers not to take anti-depressants (a recent study involving 424 people who had suffered from major depression found Mindfulness to be effective in preventing the reoccurrence of depression over a two-year period during which those taking medication had a 47% risk of relapse, while those using Mindfulness-based therapy had 44% risk of relapse). Some of these meditations bring you into the present by focusing your attention on a single repetitive action, such as your breathing, a few repeated words, or the flickering light of a candle. Other forms of Mindfulness meditation encourage you to follow, and then release, internal thoughts or sensations.

Key points in preparing for Mindfulness meditation are:

- **A quiet environment:** Choose a secluded place in your home, office, garden, place of worship or in the great outdoors where you can relax without distractions or interruptions. Mindfulness can be applied to activities such as walking, exercising or eating.
- **A comfortable position:** Sit up comfortably with your spine straight, either in a chair or on the floor. You can also sit cross-legged or in the lotus position.
- **A point of focus:** This can be internal (an imaginary scene) or something external (a flame or meaningful word or phrase repeated throughout your session). Meditation can be practised with the eyes closed or open, choosing to focus on an object in your surroundings in order to enhance concentration.
- **An observant, non-critical attitude.** Don't worry about intrusive, distracting thoughts during a session. Don't fight them: be compassionate towards yourself and gently return to your point of focus, no matter how many times this happens.

In one study, mindfulness meditation was shown to reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure, suggesting that mindfulness could help people at risk for heart disease by lowering blood pressure.

Mindfulness may also be good for hearts that are already relatively healthy. Research suggests that meditating can increase respiratory sinus arrhythmia, the

natural variations in heart rate that happen when we breathe, indicating better heart health and an increased chance of surviving a heart attack.

In a 2016 study, people with Alzheimer's disease engaged in either mindfulness meditation, cognitive stimulation therapy, relaxation training, or no treatment, and were given cognitive tests over two years. While cognitive stimulation and relaxation training seemed to be somewhat beneficial in comparison to no treatment, the mindfulness training group had much more robust improvements on cognitive scores than any other group.

In several studies, mindfulness meditation appeared to increase levels of T-cells or T-cell activity in patients with HIV or breast cancer, suggesting that mindfulness could play a role in fighting cancer and other diseases that call upon immune cells.

In another study, elderly participants were randomly assigned to an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course or a moderate-intensity exercise program. At the end, participants who'd practiced mindfulness had higher levels of the protein interleukin-8 in their nasal secretions, suggesting improved immune function.

Studies suggest that long-time meditators may have longer telomeres (the proteins found at the end of chromosomes which protect them from aging).

Mindfulness also impacts our psychological well-being. A great deal of research suggests that it can help healthy people reduce their stress and help people cope with the pain, anxiety, depression, and stress that might accompany illness, especially chronic conditions.

John Kabat-Zinn has written extensively about Mindfulness (some of his books are listed here: <http://actualitycounselling.co.uk/books.html>). His Introduction to Mindfulness for beginners can be purchased from Sounds True at: <http://www.soundstrue.com/shop/Mindfulness-for-Beginners/531.pd>.

## Binaural beats



Binaural Beats refers to a measured change in brain activity when presented with stereo, audio stimulus comprising two different tones. The brain produces a response (binaural beat) which is hearing and responding to the difference between the tones, not the actual tones themselves.

Research suggests that when we listen to binaural beats for a recommended time, our levels of arousal change. These changes occur because the binaural beats activate specific systems within the brain. Electroencephalograms (EEG) recording the electrical brain activity of people listening to binaural beats have shown that the effect on a person's body varies according to the frequency pattern used.

The four known categories of frequency pattern include:

- **Delta patterns** (a frequency of between 0.1 and 4 Hz): associated with dreamless sleep;
- **Theta patterns** (a frequency of between 4 and 8 Hz): associated with sleep in the rapid eye movement (REM) phase, meditation, and creativity;
- **Alpha pattern** (a frequency of between 8 and 13 Hz): may encourage relaxation.
- **Beta pattern** (a frequency of between 14 Hz and 100 Hz): may promote concentration and alertness. However, this frequency can also increase anxiety at the higher end of the frequency range.

## Yoga

Yoga is an ancient body of knowledge from India that dates back more than 500 years and which is aimed at uniting a person's own consciousness with the universal consciousness. The word "Yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj" which means "to unite or integrate". Yoga is about integrating mind, body and spirit; for these to be integrated, emotion, action, and intelligence must be in balance. The Yogis formulated a way to achieve and maintain this balance through exercise, breathing, and meditation.



Yoga helps us to focus and can relieve us from everyday stress. Yoga exercises and breathing techniques can improve circulation, stimulate the abdominal organs, and put pressure on the glandular system of the body, resulting in a general improvement in our health.

There is a wide range of yoga styles:

- **Hatha Yoga** (the yoga of postures) is, perhaps, the most popular and well-known branch of Yoga in the West. It uses physical poses (Asana), breathing techniques (Pranayama) and meditation to achieve better health. If you want is a peaceful mind and a healthy body, Hatha Yoga may be the path for you.
- **Vinyasa Yoga** is a general term describing many different styles of yoga. Essentially, it means movement synchronized with breath and is a vigorous style based on a rapid flow of movements.
- **Bhakti Yoga** (the Yoga of devotion) is the path most followed in India. This is the path of the heart and devotion. Yogis who practice this branch sees the "One" or the Divine in everyone and everything, and this approach develops a person's love and acceptance for all things.
- **Raja Yoga** (the Yoga of self-control) regards the self as central and, as such, respect to oneself and for all creation are vital to this path. Practitioners achieve self-respect by first learning to be masters of themselves. If you wish to learn discipline, Raja Yoga may be appropriate.
- **Jnana Yoga** (Yoga of the mind) focuses on intelligence. Jnana Yogis regard wisdom and intellect as important and aim to unify the two in order to surpass limitations. Since they wish to gain knowledge, they are open to other philosophies and religions for they believe that an open and rational mind is crucial in knowing the spirit.
- **Karma Yoga** (Yoga of service) holds the view that your present situation is based on your past actions. Thus, by performing selfless service now, you are choosing a future that is free from negativity and selfishness.
- **Tantra Yoga** (Yoga of rituals) is, perhaps, the most misunderstood of all the paths. This form of Yoga is about using rituals to experience what is sacred (sex is a part, but not all, of it, since this path aims to find what is sacred in everything we do).

- **Ashtanga Yoga** involves adopting a series of postures, always in the same order, while being encouraged to breathe as you move from pose to pose. It is typically fast-paced, vigorous and physically challenging.
- **Power Yoga** is a vigorous, Vinyasa-style Yoga which was developed in order to make Ashtanga Yoga more accessible to Western students. It differs from Ashtanga Yoga in that it is not a set series of poses but rather allows instructors freedom to teach what they want.
- **Bikram Yoga**, founded by Bikram Choudhury, is the same throughout the world, consisting of the same, copyrighted, 26 postures and two breathing techniques, in the same order for ninety minutes, in a room heated to 105°F (40.6°C), with a humidity of 40%.
- **Jivamukti Yoga** was established in 1984. Classes resemble Ashtanga Yoga. Each class begins with a unique, standardized warm-up sequence. Teachers will sometimes incorporate weekly themes, chanting, meditation, readings and affirmations.
- **Iyengar Yoga** is characterised by an intense focus on the subtleties of each posture. Poses are held much longer than in other schools of Yoga, in an effort to pay closer attention to precise musculoskeletal alignment. Another trademark is the use of props such as blocks, belts, bolsters, chairs and blankets which are used to accommodate injuries, tightness or structural imbalances, as well as to teach students how to move properly into each posture.
- **Anusara Yoga** is a new system of Hatha Yoga that teaches a set of Universal Principles of Alignment which underlie all Yoga postures, while encouraging flowing with grace and following your heart.
- **Sivananda Yoga** is a form of Hatha Yoga which comprises a series of moves designed to increase strength and flexibility of the spine. Chanting and meditation can also be a part of a full-length class. The Sivananda system is based on five main principles: proper exercise, proper breathing, proper relaxation, proper diet, positive thinking and meditation.
- **Viniyoga** adapts the various means and methods of practice to the unique condition, needs and interests of each individual. The goal is to give practitioners the tools to individualize and actualize the process of self-discovery and personal transformation.
- **Kundalini Yoga** incorporates repeated movements or exercises, dynamic breathing techniques, chanting, meditation and mantras. The practice is designed to awaken the energy at the base of the spine in order to draw it upward through each of the seven chakras. This form of Yoga looks and feels quite different from any other, due to its focus on repetitive, enhanced breathing and the movement of energy through the body.
- **Yin Yoga** is a slow-paced style of Yoga in which poses are held for five minutes or longer. Even though it is passive, Yin Yoga can be quite challenging due to the long holds, particularly if your body is not used to it. The purpose is to apply moderate stress to the connective tissue - the tendons, fascia and ligaments with the aim of increasing circulation in the joints and improving flexibility.

- **Dru Yoga** is a style of yoga that works with postures, breath work, relaxation and meditation.
- **Integrative Yoga Therapy (IYT)** integrates a number of Yoga practices in a complete package which can be utilised for therapy. Founded by Joseph Le Page in 1993, IYT attempts to create a training program with the focus on Yoga as a healing art. It has resulted in the design of programs specifically for medical and mainstream wellness settings, including hospital and rehabilitation centres.
- **Restorative Yoga** is a gentle, relaxing and passive form of Yoga that allows students to relax and release the body into a gentle stretch that is held for as long as 10 minutes. This style utilises a wide range of props including bolsters, blocks, straps and blankets. The intention is to provide support within each pose, making it easier to completely let go.

There are misconceptions about Yoga:

- Yoga is not a religion. It is a set of techniques for finding and developing spirituality and is practiced by people of all religions.
- Although Yoga is an exercise, a way to keep fit, it is more than that. It focuses on the mental and spiritual aspects of our lives as well as the physical. It aims at developing the body since a weak one is a hindrance to spiritual growth.

## Tai Chi

Tai Chi, as practiced in the West today, can best be thought of as a moving form of a combination of Yoga and meditation. There are a number of so-called *forms* consisting of a sequence of movements. Many of these are derived from martial arts and the natural movements of animals and birds; they are performed slowly, softly and gracefully with smooth and even transitions between them.



Many practitioners use Tai Chi as a meditative exercise for the body. In Chinese philosophy and medicine the concept of 'chi' relates to a vital force that animates the body; one of the aims of Tai Chi is to foster the circulation of 'chi' within the body.

Another aim of Tai Chi is to foster a calm and tranquil mind, focused on the precise execution of these exercises. Learning to do them correctly provides a practical avenue for learning about such things as balance, alignment, fine-scale motor control, rhythm of movement and the genesis of movement from the body's vital centre. Thus the practice of Tai Chi can, in some measure, contribute to being able to better stand, walk, move, run, etc. in other spheres of life as well. Many practitioners notice benefits in terms of correcting poor postural, alignment or movement patterns which can contribute to tension or injury. Furthermore the meditative nature of the exercises is calming and relaxing in and of itself.

You can find more information about Tai Chi from the [Tai Chi Union for Great Britain](#).

## Massage

**Massage** is a general term for a range of techniques which work and act on the body with pressure – structured, unstructured, stationary, or moving – tension, motion, or vibration, done manually or with mechanical aids. The aim is to enhance function, aid in the healing process, and promote relaxation and well-being. Clients may be treated while lying on a massage table, sitting in a massage chair, or lying on a mat on the floor; they can be fully or partly unclothed. Parts of the body may be covered with towels or sheets. Those who practice massage as a career are referred to as massage therapists.

The following brief descriptions introduce some of the most popular forms of massage:

### *Swedish Massage Therapy*



This is one of the most common types of massage therapy. It is also known as Swedish massage or simply massage therapy. Massage therapists use long smooth strokes, kneading, and circular movements on superficial layers of muscle using massage lotion or oil.

### *Aromatherapy Massage*

Aromatherapy massage is massage therapy with the addition of one or more scented plant oils (essential oils) to address specific needs (to relax, energise, reduce stress, balance, etc. This form of massage is particularly suited to stress-related conditions or conditions with an emotional component. See also Aromatherapy (page 37).

### *Hot Stone Massage*



In this form of massage, heated, smooth stones are placed on certain points on the body to warm and loosen tight muscles and balance the body's energy centres. The massage therapist may also hold stones and apply gentle pressure with them - the warmth is comforting. Hot stone massage is effective for people who suffer from muscle tension but prefer lighter massage.

### *Deep Tissue Massage*

Deep tissue massage targets the deeper layers of muscle and connective tissue. The massage therapist uses slower strokes or friction techniques across the grain of the muscle. This approach is used for chronically tight or painful muscles, repetitive

strain, postural problems, or recovery from injury. People often feel sore for one or two days after using this approach.

### ***Shiatsu***



Shiatsu is a form of Japanese bodywork that uses localised finger pressure in a rhythmic sequence on acupuncture meridians. Each point is held for two to eight seconds to improve the flow of energy and help the body regain balance. Shiatsu is relaxing, yet the pressure is firm and there is usually no soreness afterwards.

### ***Thai Massage***

Like Shiatsu, Thai massage aligns the energies of the body using gentle pressure on specific points. Thai massage also includes compressions and stretches. The therapist moves and stretches you into a sequence of postures (like yoga without doing any work). Thai massage is more energizing than other forms of massage. It is also reduces stress and improves flexibility and range of motion.

### ***Pregnancy (or Prenatal) Massage***

This is becoming increasingly popular with expectant mothers. Massage therapists who are certified in pregnancy massage know the proper way to position and support the woman's body during the massage, and how to modify techniques. Pregnancy massage can reduce stress, decrease swelling, relieve aches and pains, and reduce anxiety and depression. The massage is customized to your individual needs.

### ***Indian Head Massage***

Indian Head Massage is an effective therapy that has evolved from traditional techniques practised in India for over a thousand years. It focuses on the head, neck



and the shoulders where stress affects major muscle groups, and it often brings immediate relief. Tensions are eased and fibrous knots and nodules melt away. The efficiency of the circulatory and lymphatic systems improves, toxins are dispersed from tense muscles, and flexibility and fluidity of movement is restored.

This form of massage:

- relieves tension, headaches, neck and back pain;
- alleviates stress and promotes relaxation;
- stimulates lymphatic drainage, helping to remove toxins and boosting the immune system;

- restores joint mobility and improves circulation; and
- reaches all energy centres where tension accumulates.

## Smiling



We all know that when we are happier we tend to smile more. What may be less well known is that the more we smile, the happier we are likely to be.

Research suggests that smiling can make us more likely to recover from stress. A smile – even a fake one – encourages the growth of new neuronal pathways in the brain, leading to improvements in memory, logic, learning skills and immune function. It can also heighten spirituality, reduce stress hormones and boost our mood.

A ‘full’ smile – one which engages the muscles in the mouth, cheeks, and eyes - stimulates the production of dopamine (our reward or pleasure neurotransmitter). It can contribute towards improvements in energy, focus, mood, attention, alertness and libido, and can increase feelings of joy, confidence, happiness, an overall sense of well-being and mild euphoria.

Smiling also releases serotonin which plays a significant role in modulating body temperature, sleep, pain, mood and appetite, and improves self-esteem, our sense of well-being and our overall contentedness with life. It is like a natural anti-depressant.

Try smiling for 20-30 seconds and then relax your face. Repeat the exercise over a period of time and see if you begin to feel more positive. You might like to try doing the exercise in front of a mirror so that you can experience what psychologists call *facial feedback*, where your emotions begin to conform to your facial features.

## Gratitude



Gratitude is defined as “the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness”.

Gratitude, and the expression of it to others, is associated with increased energy, optimism, and empathy. Studies have shown that the hippocampus and the amygdala (the two main sites regulating emotions, memory, and bodily functioning) are activated when we feel dopamine into our brains, thereby reducing

gratitude. Smiling also releases subjective feelings of pain.

By practicing gratitude, we incline our mind to pay attention to positive things and train ourselves to experience more contentment and joy, thus cultivating mental health and well-being. You cannot feel grateful and angry at the *same* time. Therefore, to practise gratitude continuously is to be continuously developing our emotional well-being.

A number of exercises exist which can increase one’s gratitude and one’s awareness of it. Here is a selection:

- While having your first cup of coffee of the day, spend a few minutes thinking of all the things that you’re grateful for: the warmth of the coffee mug you’re holding; the aroma of the coffee; the beautiful morning; the beginning of a new day; the quiet just before the day officially starts.
- Think of some of the things that you may take for granted: your home; your ability to see or hear; your ability to walk, or anything that currently gives you comfort. Consider how grateful you are for these things.
- Keep a Gratitude Journal. Before going to bed each night, write a list of five things about that day for which you’re grateful.
- Place an object (a “Gratitude Trigger”) somewhere in your house or workspace which will remind you to feel grateful each time that you look at it.

Write a letter of gratitude to someone who did something, or said something, that changed your life for the better. The letter should be about 300 words long and should state specifically what you are grateful for. Tell the person that you would like to visit them but don’t let them know why. When you meet, take time reading your letter and note the reactions of the person to whom you are reading it. When you have read the letter, take some time to discuss the content and your feelings for each other.

## Herbalism

Herbalism provides a complete system of healing and disease prevention, and is one of the oldest and most natural forms of medicine. As a holistic medicine (one which considers the whole person, physically and psychologically, rather than just isolating the diseased part), it looks beyond the symptoms to the underlying systemic imbalance. When applied correctly, herbal medicine provides real and permanent solutions to real problems.



The medicinal properties of herbs have been known for thousands of years and many societies have eaten plants and herbs for their health giving properties.

Herbal Medicine can be regarded as the forerunner of modern pharmacology and is used today as an effective and more natural method of the treatment and prevention of illness. Nowhere is the efficacy of herbalism more evident than in the problems relating to the nervous system. Stress, anxiety, tension and depression are connected to most illnesses and are known to contribute to duodenal and gastric ulceration, irritable bowel syndrome and other gut-related pathologies.

Herbalists rely on their knowledge of botanical remedies to rectify a type of human malfunction: the conflict between the human body's voluntary nervous system and the autonomic processes, which usually leads to illness.

Herbs are free from toxins and do not lead to habituation. They are organic substances (unlike man-made synthetic chemicals) and therefore possess an affinity with the human body. Restoring a sense of well-being and relaxation is necessary for optimum health and for the process of self-healing.

You can find more information about herbalism at the [British Herbal Medicine Association](#).

## Homoeopathy

Homoeopathy is a system of medicine which involves treating the individual with highly-diluted natural substances (usually made from plants, minerals, or animals), given mainly in tablet form, with the aim of triggering the body's natural system of healing. Based on their specific symptoms, a homoeopath will match the most appropriate medicine to each patient.



Homoeopathy is based on the principle of treating 'like with like' (i.e. a substance which causes symptoms when taken in large doses can be used in small amounts to treat those same symptoms). For example, drinking too much coffee can cause sleeplessness and agitation; however, according to this principle, when made into a homoeopathic remedy, it can be used to treat people who have these symptoms. This concept is sometimes used in conventional medicine, the difference being that, with homoeopathic medicines, the substances are highly diluted and non-toxic.

Homoeopathy is perfectly safe: two hundred years of practice, research and trials have proven the safety of this gentle system of medicine for both people and animals. Unlike some conventional drugs, homoeopathic medicines are non-addictive and have no dangerous side-effects; they are safe for babies, children, and pregnant and breastfeeding women, ideally under the supervision of a homoeopathic doctor.

Homoeopathy has been used to tackle stress and its associated symptoms. For more information, visit [The Society of Homoeopaths](#) or the [British Homoeopathic Association](#).

## Counselling/Therapy

Counselling (also known as “therapy” or “psychotherapy”) is often referred to as a “talking therapy”.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) describes therapy as “a safe, confidential ‘place’ to talk about your life and anything that may be confusing, painful or uncomfortable. It allows you to talk with someone who is trained to listen attentively and to help you improve things.”. The BACP website [itsgoodtotalk](http://itsgoodtotalk.org) contains information about all aspects of therapy and counselling.

Many people find that having the opportunity to talk to someone who is not a member of their family or a close friend (but who will listen to them, be accepting of them and be genuine in the relationship) is a powerful experience which can enable them to talk freely about their problems and can empower them to take more control of their lives.



Counselling can provide an opportunity to identify the source of your stress, to manage your life differently or to support you through a stressful period by developing coping strategies for your day-to-day life.

It is important to find a counsellor with whom you feel safe and can establish a good rapport. It is also important to find a way of working which feels right for you. Many counsellors offer a free, initial consultation giving you an opportunity to meet them and ask questions about the process. The BACP website provides a brief description of the various [theoretical approaches](#) to counselling which are available and you can use the website search for a [counsellor](#) in your area.

## Reiki

Reiki (pronounced ray-key) is a Japanese word meaning Universal Life Energy. The term has been applied to various techniques which restore and balance the natural life-force energy. Essentially, Reiki is a system of natural healing which evolved in Japan from the work of Dr Mikao Usui. It is neither a dogma nor a religion. It is a method of maintaining your sense of well-being on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels, and is also a unique tool for personal transformation and growth. It is a holistic system which treats the whole person rather than specific symptoms.



Reiki can help with specific physical problems and illnesses and can also heal on an emotional level to ensure that any physical problems, caused by stress and emotional trauma, do not return. Reiki teaches you how to relax; when you are completely relaxed your stress diminishes. Reiki also helps your body to function at optimum levels, reducing the risk of developing illnesses.

To receive treatment, patients normally lie on a couch; if they are unable to lie down, the treatment can be given in a sitting position. There is no need to remove any clothing as Reiki works through anything (even plaster casts). The practitioner gently places their hands non-intrusively in a sequence of positions which cover the whole body (this is a technique known as “palm healing” or “hands on healing”). A full treatment usually takes 1 to 1½ hours with each position held for several minutes.

Reiki can help you begin to see everything from a different perspective and can heal past emotional traumas so that they can no longer prevent you from self-development. It can leave you feeling less constrained by the environment, help you to develop better coping mechanisms and free you to be yourself. It helps you to feel at peace with yourself, be compassionate to yourself and to do what is 'right' for you rather than setting yourself unachievable goals and having unrealistic expectations.



After receiving Reiki treatment, many people report that the life events that used to cause them stress no longer have the same impact on them. Reiki also teaches you not to put yourself in situations that are harmful to you, to detach from the people that are merely draining you and to begin to do the things that are right for you. Reiki teaches you that you are not here to please anyone you are here to do what is right for your path on this earth, for yourself and for others. There is a huge difference between doing what is right for people and trying to please them.

Reiki can provide you with more focus and clarity, as well as helping you to trust your intuition and to handle stressful situations in a much healthier way, leaving you with a greater sense of direction and understanding of why you are here along with an inner peace and a real sense of happiness.

## Reflexology

Reflexology is a non-intrusive complementary health therapy, based on the theory that different points on the feet, lower leg, hands, face or ears correspond with different areas of the body. Reflexologists work holistically with their clients and aim to work alongside allopathic healthcare to promote better health for their clients.



The theory of reflexology is that it helps the body to restore its balance naturally. Whilst the practice of reflexology dates back to Ancient Egypt, India and China, it was not introduced to the West until Dr William Fitzgerald developed 'Zone therapy' which linked reflex areas on the feet and hands to other areas and organs of the body within the same zone. In the 1930's, Eunice Ingham developed zone theory into what is known as reflexology. Her opinion was that congestion or tension in any part of the foot is mirrored in the corresponding part of the body.

Energy flow around the body can become blocked resulting in illness, physical problems and also a lack of wellbeing. Reflexology helps to clear the energy pathways and restore homeostasis (balance within the body), vitality and wellbeing; it induces deep relaxation which, in turn, can cause a release of emotions. When the body is in this state of deep relaxation, it is able to function more efficiently.

Reflexology also helps to release endorphins (the body's natural pain killers) into the blood stream - this combats pain. Circulation of oxygen and nutrients is improved, aiding the removal of waste products.

Reflexology can be received by anyone at any age, from new-born babies to those receiving end-of-life care and everyone in between. However, there may occasionally be times when it is not suitable as a treatment.

Reflexology can be one way of mitigating the stresses of modern life. Usually, after a treatment, tension may be reduced and you might feel relaxed. You might notice that you sleep better and that your mood and sense of wellbeing improve, as well as improvements in other areas. However, reflexology is a very individual treatment which works holistically, so it is not possible to know in advance how each individual will react.

Read more about reflexology at the [Association of Reflexologists](#).

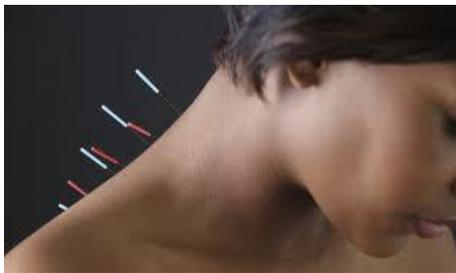
## Acupuncture

Acupuncture developed, and was originally codified, in China from at least 1000 BCE.

Traditional acupuncturists believe that the underlying principle of treatment is that there is a network of qi (pronounced “chi”), or vital energy, just below the surface of the skin which communicates from the exterior to the internal organs and structures via 1,000 ‘acupoints’ on the body. Qi is influenced by the forces of yin and yang, polar opposites in which life is searching for harmony and balance.



According to traditional Chinese medicine, when yin and yang are balanced, they work together with the natural flow of qi to help the body achieve and maintain health. Illness and pain occur when the body's qi energy cannot flow freely, often as a result of emotional and physical stress, poor nutrition, infection or injury.



By inserting ultra-fine, sterile needles into specific acupuncture points (meridian points) which are primarily located along meridians, a traditional acupuncturist seeks to re-establish the free flow of qi to restore balance, trigger the body's natural healing response and help a person to re-establish harmony with themselves, their emotions and their life as a whole.

There is hardly any pain involved in acupuncture. For the majority of meridian points, there may be a slight discomfort initially when the needle is tapped into the point and then when it is inserted to the proper depth. For a small number of points, there will be a sharpness when the needle is tapped in and when it is manipulated further.

Traditional acupuncture has been absorbed by Western medicine and has a long history of adapting to new cultures in which it is practised. Acupuncture and other energy therapies continue to be investigated and developed and, during the past few decades, professionals in several fields have turned their attention to this so-called ‘alternative therapy’.

## Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

EFT is a safe and natural 'alternative' therapy which has been used to address stress as well as many other emotional and physical ailments. It is simple to learn and easy to use and, within a very short time, you can use it on yourself.

EFT belongs to the family of 'energy' therapies (e.g. Reiki, Acupuncture and Reflexology) which have been developed and refined for centuries. Using it can result in fewer visits to medical practitioners, taking fewer chemical medicines and can enable you to take control of your own health, stimulating your body to rely on its own, natural healing powers; it can also be used as a relaxation technique. Some people have overcome lifelong problems in minutes; others have had to be more persistent.



The theory behind EFT is that negative emotions are caused by a disruption to the body's energy system and that, in order to remove the negative responses, the energy imbalance must be addressed at the same time as the negative emotions. The basic technique involves focusing on an emotional or physical problem while simultaneously tapping on a series of 13 points on the body (a subset of the meridian points used in acupuncture and Chinese medicine).

You do **not** have to believe in EFT for it to work; many people did not believe in it until they experienced the benefits for themselves.

## Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy is distinctive among the psychological therapies in that it attempts to address the client's subconscious mind.

Hypnosis is a trance state from within which you can access your sub-conscious. The word "Hypno" comes from the Greek word "Υπνος" ("hupnos") which means sleep. Although a hypnotic trance is not exactly sleeping, it is a deeply relaxed, dreamlike state, between waking and sleeping. In this state, you can experience extreme relaxation and, as you shift from deep relaxation to waking, you may become aware of the two 'worlds' known as the conscious and sub-conscious mind.



A hypnotherapist induces a hypnotic state using your own imagination or a wide range of techniques including story-telling or metaphors. Once you have entered this state, the therapist may use analytical techniques to uncover problems which might stem from your past; alternatively, he or she may concentrate more on your current life and presenting problems, making direct suggestions for beneficial change. It can help if you are committed to change, although a belief

in the possibility of beneficial change may be a sufficient starting point.

Unlike some other therapies, Hypnotherapy is generally considered to be a relatively short-term approach in which beneficial change, if it is to occur, should become apparent within a few sessions.

Hypnotherapy can help you to:

- gain insight into present difficulties and past events;
- create new beliefs that reflect your true inner self;
- increase creativity and clarity of thought;
- deepen intuition and inner peace;
- increase self-esteem and optimism about life;
- reduce physical illness;
- unlock inner potential, creating mind-body healing;
- improve relationships; and
- heal physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

## Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy involves using volatile plant oils known as 'essential oils' to treat or prevent disease. It is a complementary therapy which treats the whole person, rather than simply the symptom or disease, by assisting the body's natural ability to balance, regulate, heal and maintain itself. The soothing combination of aromas, massage, aromatic baths and other treatments can help to regulate, balance, heal and maintain your entire being by working with nature, and not against it.



Aromatherapy offers a wide range of highly effective treatments for both the acute and chronic stages of illness and disease. Regular treatment can help to strengthen the immune system, thereby establishing a preventative approach to overall health.

Essential oils consist of tiny aromatic molecules that are readily absorbed via the skin and can enter the lungs. After entering the bloodstream, they are carried around the body where they can deliver their beneficial healing powers. Because the oils are highly concentrated, only a small quantity is required to bring about results.

Scientists and doctors have known for a long time that negative and positive emotions can affect the complex chemistry of our bodies and that these changes can affect our immune system.

Aromatherapy offers one way of combating stress without having to resort to chemical drugs which can be habit-forming and can be harmful to your health. By considering the causes of your stress and providing treatments to ease and manage it, an aromatherapist can alleviate the condition much more efficiently.



## Hopi ear candles

Ear candles are derived from a tradition which can be traced back to the Indians of North and South America. The practice of using ear candles was brought to modern Europe by the Hopi, the oldest Pueblo tribe, who have extensive medical knowledge and deep spirituality.

Ear candles are made from natural ingredients (pure beeswax, honey extract and traditional herbs such as sage, St. John's Wort, chamomile and pure essential oils) and are traditionally used to cleanse and harmonise the body's energy fields.

The candles work by causing a light suction action (like a chimney) and the movement of the flame helps to create a vibration of air in the ear candle, generating a massage-like effect on the eardrum. This induces a pleasant feeling of warmth and a balance of pressure in the ears and forehead, and also stimulates peripheral blood circulation, thus intensifying the immunological defence system and lymph-cleansing circulation.



Though results may vary from patient to patient, Hopi Candles have been found to help with:

- excessive or compacted wax in the ears;
- irritation in ears and sinuses;
- pressure regulation in cases of sinusitis, rhinitis, glue ear, colds, flu, headaches and migraine;
- stimulation of local and reflex energy flow;
- energetic revitalisation in cases of hearing impairment;
- relaxing and calming effect in cases of stress; and
- noises in the ears, ringing and tinnitus.

## Baoding balls



Baoding balls (also known as Chinese Exercise Balls, Chinese Therapy Balls, Chinese Stress Balls, and Chinese Health Balls) can be used for exercise and meditation but are also employed for medical reasons. They can bring benefits when they touch the pressure points (acupuncture meridian points) on the hands.

Some Baoding balls are made with small bumps and are known as “health balls”. The small bumps are known to boost the circulation of the blood while relaxing joints and muscles. Disorders such as hypertension, arthritis of the fingers and wrists, as well as numbness and trembling of the hands can be prevented and improved through using these balls.

When used for exercise, place two of the balls in your palm and rotate them clockwise and anti-clockwise.

## Spiritual exploration

Spirituality has been defined as an ultimate, immaterial reality: an inner path enabling you to discover the essence of your being or the deepest values and meanings by which you live.

Spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer and contemplation can develop one's inner life. Spiritual experience includes a connectedness with a larger reality, with other individuals or the human community, with nature or the cosmos or with the divine realm. This can result in a sense of a more fulfilled and authentic self. Spirituality can encompass belief in immaterial realities or experiences of the immanent or transcendent nature of the world.



For some people, spirituality is synonymous with formal religious practices; for others, it is something less structured. Whatever spirituality means to you, it might be a dimension of your life which requires 'feeding' and which, perhaps, has been neglected. It might be worth exploring your 'spirituality' with the aim of becoming more 'whole' and reducing any stress which might relate to who you are as a person and how you fit into the world.