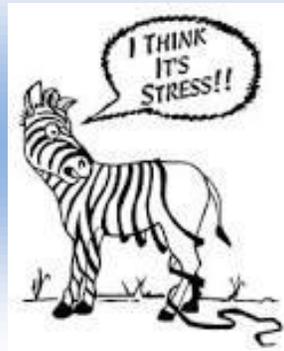


## Stress and Mindfulness



### What is it and how do I know I'm feeling it?

Stress affects all of us at different times in our lives and it shows itself in different ways in different people.

#### What is Stress?

Stress happens when we believe that we are facing demands that we don't think we can cope with. Stress is your bodies way of reacting to these demands. It can be both positive and negative. If we have no stress in our lives, we become bored and discouraged, we need a little stress to motivate us and keep us going. Too much stress can challenge our physical and mental health.

#### The Stress Response

When we are faced with demands that we think are/ will be too much for us our bodies go into fight or flight mode. This means that our bodies prepare to fight or run from the stressor. A chemical called adrenaline is released and this gives us extra energy that we can use to deal with the situation. This is good if we are facing physical danger and can use up all this extra energy fighting or fleeing, but not so good if the stress is a response to something that is more emotional than physical and that our adrenaline won't help us with.



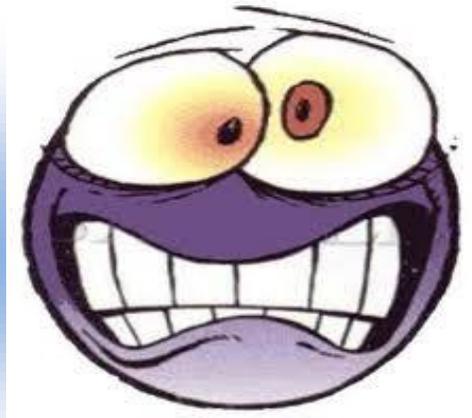
When we are faced with demands we are not able to meet on an ongoing basis we start to develop signs and symptoms that can affect all areas of our wellbeing in different ways. It can affect you:

- Physically – how you feel in your body.
- Emotionally – how you feel emotionally.
- Behaviorally – what you do/ what you want to do
- Cognitively – what you think.

### **What Can You Do?**

If you can spot the signs and symptoms of stress early on you are more likely to be able to deal with them effectively. If you know what *your* stress triggers are, you can:

- Take action to make changes to how you live your life, to reduce the amount of time you are exposed to these triggers.
- Change how you respond to these triggers, to reduce their effect on you.



These worksheets can help you to identify and manage your stress.



## Signs and Symptoms

Stress affects us in many different ways. Think about the last time you felt under pressure or stressed for any length of time. Now use the space below to identify how the stress affected you under the four headings given.

<b>Physical</b> How Did I Feel in my Body?	<b>Emotional</b> What Emotions did I Feel?	<b>Behavioural</b> What did I do/ Want to do?	<b>Cognitive</b> What did I Think?



## Stress Triggers

Now let's look at the types of situations that tend to lead to these stress reactions in you - your Stress Triggers. Think back over the last number of days, months or years and try to identify some situations, events or encounters that led to the stress reactions you have identified on the last sheet.

<b>Situation/ Event/ Encounter</b>	<b>My Stress Response Physical/ Emotional/ Behavioral/ Cognitive</b>



## Delving Deeper

The next thing you need to do if you are to manage your stress is to look deeper into these situations/ encounters/ events to see if you can identify what particular parts of them were the main triggers for your stress response. Looking at each situation further using the headings below might help with this.

What was happening?	Who was involved?	Where did it happen? (location/ setting)	When did it happen? (time of the day/ month/ year)	What was most stressful about it for me?



## Stress

### What Can You Do?

There are lots of different things you can do to control stress. You can use these techniques to stop it from happening in the first place, and to manage it when it does happen.

Bringing calmness into your life on a daily basis has great benefits both immediately and in the long-term. Finding calm gives you a timeout from stress. It is something you have to actively create it is not something that just comes to you.

When you are feeling calm:

- Your mood is better.
- Daily irritations are more tolerable.
- Your body relaxes and your heart rate and blood pressure go down.
- Your level of agitation and frustration lessens.

### **Mindfulness**

Our minds tend to focus on the future and what is to come and the past and what has happened. This adds to our stress as we cannot do anything about either in the here and now. If we can bring our minds into the present, even for a short time, this can help us to manage stress better.

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention and focusing awareness – in short, being fully conscious of the here and now. It is good for our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing because it helps reduce stress. It is essentially about keeping your head where your feet are – in the present.



The good thing about mindfulness is that it can be used anytime, anywhere and it doesn't take long – literally a minute at a time can be enough to help you through stressful times.

There are 1440 minutes in every day. We can all afford to take at least five 60 second breaks in our day to practice mindfulness, increase calm, and refocus. There will still be 1435 minutes left to fit everything else into! You don't have to be in any particular place with any special equipment or environment to practice mindfulness – you can literally do it on the bus, while waiting for the kettle to boil, or even in the bathroom.

You might find it difficult at the start because in the beginning calm can feel unusual. Just sitting still for even a few seconds can be difficult when you are used to the buzz of dashing around always doing something. With practice you will get used to it and will get to enjoy the calmness, focus, and reduction in stress it brings.

### **Mindfulness Minute**

The following exercise takes you through a mindfulness minute. It is best to start by practicing this in a quiet space and when you get the hang of it you can then start to practice it any time any place, sitting down or standing up. You could record it on your phone or another recorder and then play it back to yourself while you practice it.





Sit in a comfortable chair. Uncross your arms and legs and close your eyes or soft focus on a spot on the floor or the wall.

Take a deep breath in pushing your belly out as you inhale.

Breathe out dropping your shoulders as you exhale.

Take another deep breath in pushing your belly out as you inhale.

Breathe out dropping your shoulders as you exhale.

Notice any thoughts that come into your head without focusing on them – notice that they are there but do not pay any attention to what they are about – let them go as you breathe in and out.

Notice the sounds both inside and outside of the room – again notice they are there but do not pay attention to them and let them go as you breathe in and out.

Breathe in calm as you fill your lungs and push your belly out and breathe out stress as you drop your shoulders and relax.

Take another two or three breaths in and out breathing in calm and breathing out stress before opening your eyes and slowly reconnecting with the world

## Mindfulness Minute

### Where and When



You can use the space below to list the times and places where it would be most useful for you to take a mindfulness minute. The times may include the start and end of the day, at natural break times during the day such as mealtimes, just before you are about to start something that you find difficult, or after something difficult has happened – it's up to you. Places could be anywhere that you can get some space on your own. There is no best time or place – you need to find a way to fit this into your life in a way that suits you.

Times When I Could Benefit from a Mindfulness Minute	Places Where I Could Take a Mindfulness Minute



## **Mindfulness Minute – My Contract with Myself**

It might be useful when you are starting to use mindfulness minutes as a way of bringing calm into your life to make a contract with yourself to take at least 5 minutes out of every day. You can use the table below at the beginning of the week to agree with yourself the times that you will take these minutes or as a way of recording that you have taken the 5 breaks every day. You can write the time that you plan to take/took each break in the space provided and then tick the boxes to check that you have done it at the end of each mindfulness minute or at the end of each day.



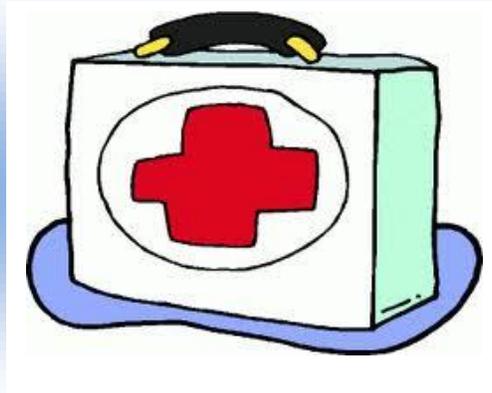
	<b>Minute 1</b>	<b>Minute 2</b>	<b>Minute 3</b>	<b>Minute 4</b>	<b>Minute 5</b>
<b>Monday</b>					
<b>Tuesday</b>					
<b>Wednesday</b>					
<b>Thursday</b>					
<b>Friday</b>					
<b>Saturday</b>					
<b>Sunday</b>					

## Mindfulness First Aid Kit

There are times and places in all of our lives where it is more difficult to find calm. During these times and in these places, it can be useful to have something to support us in doing this.

One suggestion is to create a mindfulness first aid kit that contains things that you can use to bring you into the present moment and draw your mind away from the past or the future. The kit should include things that you enjoy and that touch your five senses:

- Sight
- Taste
- Sound
- Touch
- Smell



You can pick several items that touch each sense but don't pick anything encourages you to think too much or that triggers very strong feelings. If possible, try to make your kit up from small things so that you can take it with you if you need to. Think about where you will store it – in a bag, in a drawer, in your pocket etc.

Some suggestions for things you might include are listed below but you can choose any objects you like as long as they help you focus on them and not what is going on around you.

- Visual – a pleasant picture – maybe a photo, a postcard, something you cut from a magazine.

- Taste – something you like to taste (preferably something with a long shelf life) e.g., chocolate, a favourite sweet, dried fruit.
- Sound – maybe a song you like, a meditation, an animal noise, a prayer etc. – you could record this on your phone or an mp3 player.
- Touch – pick something with a strong texture or temperature like a stone, a marble or a piece of material.
- Smell – pick something you like to smell like coffee beans, an air freshener, perfumed magazine inserts, a tissue sprayed with a favourite perfume/ aftershave.

You can have objects that combine the senses and create a nice ritual e.g. if you include a tea bag you can smell it first, feel the warm mug as the tea brews, and taste it once it's ready.

The most important thing is that the first aid kit is personal to you and it should be something that you can use to bring you into the present and to bring up pleasant thoughts and feelings.

## What's in Your Mental Health First Aid Kit?



## Mindfulness Actions



There are other simple things you can do every day to bring mindfulness into your life to help you refocus and bring more calm into your life.

These don't take a lot of time and are worth practicing even though they can seem false or strange at first. After a while, if you keep practicing them, they can just become a normal and enjoyable part of your day.

- Allow yourself to stop, focus on your breathing and notice how you feel in your body at regular times throughout your day. It is amazing the difference stopping for a couple of seconds focusing on your breathing can have on your wellness.
- Stop from time to time during the day and notice your feelings and emotions and the effect they are having on you. This gives you time and space to decide whether it is possible to change them to improve your wellness.
- Take a minute and really look at the people and things around you – notice the colours, shapes, textures – this will help to bring you back into the moment when your mind is full of other things.
- When you are walking and find your head full of thoughts that are affecting how you feel bring your attention to your feet and how they feel as they hit the ground – walk mindfully paying attention to the movement of your body and how it connects with the surface you are walking on
- If you are eating and your mind is full of other things, bring your attention to the food, its smell, taste, texture etc. – eat mindfully paying attention to every mouthful as you taste and chew it.



## Impact Sheet - Mindfulness Practice – How Did This Work For Me?

You can use this sheet to record the effect that using your mindfulness minutes, mindfulness first aid kit, and other mindfulness practices has had on you and your stress levels – this can help to find out what has worked best for you and when it has worked and to encourage you to keep it up. You can record the type of mindfulness practice you did each day and what difference it made to you in terms of how you felt physically and emotionally, what you did and what you thought. This sheet should be filled in at the end of every day so that the effect is clear in your mind. Use one sheet for each week.

<b>Date:</b>	<b>What I did</b>	<b>What difference did this make?</b>
<b>Monday</b>		
<b>Tuesday</b>		
<b>Wednesday</b>		
<b>Thursday</b>		
<b>Friday</b>		
<b>Saturday</b>		
<b>Sunday</b>		