

10 Natural Depression Treatments

By R. Morgan Griffin

Being depressed can make you feel helpless. You're not. Along with therapy and sometimes medication, there's a lot you can do on your own to fight back.

Changing your behavior—your physical activity, lifestyle, and even your way of thinking—are all natural depression treatments.

These tips can help you feel better—starting right now.

1. **Get in a Routine.** If you're depressed, you need a routine, says Ian Cook, MD. He's a psychiatrist and director of the Depression Research and Clinic Program at UCLA. Depression can strip away the structure from your life. One day melts into the next. Setting a gentle daily schedule can help you get back on track.
2. **Set Goals.** When you're depressed, you may feel like you can't accomplish anything. That makes you feel worse about yourself. To push back, set daily goals for yourself. "Start very small," Cook says. "Make your goal something that you can succeed at, like doing the dishes every other day." As you start to feel better, you can add more challenging daily goals.
3. **Exercise.** It temporarily boosts feel-good chemicals called endorphins. It may also have long-term benefits for people with depression. Regular exercise seems to encourage the brain to rewire itself in positive ways, Cook says. How much exercise do you need? You don't need to run marathons to get a benefit. Just walking a few times a week can help.
4. **Eat Healthy.** There is no magic diet that fixes depression. It's a good idea to watch what you eat, though. If depression tends to make you overeat, getting in control of your eating will help you feel better. Although nothing is definitive, Cook says there's evidence that foods with omega-3 fatty acids (such as salmon and tuna) and folic acid (such as spinach and avocado) could help ease depression.
5. **Get Enough Sleep.** Depression can make it hard to get enough shut-eye, and too little sleep can make depression worse. What can you do? Start by making some changes to your lifestyle. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.

Try not to nap. Take all the distractions out of your bedroom -- no computer and no TV. In time, you may find your sleep improves.

6. **Take on Responsibilities.** When you're depressed, you may want to pull back from life and give up your responsibilities at home and at work. Don't. Staying involved and having daily responsibilities can work as a natural depression treatment. They ground you and give you a sense of accomplishment. If you're not up to full-time school or work, that's fine. Think about part-time. If that seems like too much, consider volunteer work.

7. **Challenge Negative Thoughts.** In your fight against depression, a lot of the work is mental—changing how you think. When you're depressed, you leap to the worst possible conclusions. The next time you're feeling terrible about yourself, use logic as a natural depression treatment. You might feel like no one likes you, but is there real evidence for that? You might feel like the most worthless person on the planet, but is that really likely? It takes practice, but in time you can beat back those negative thoughts before they get out of control.

8. **Check With Your Doctor Before Using Supplements.** "There's promising evidence for certain supplements for depression," Cook says. Those include fish oil, folic acid, and SAMe. But more research needs to be done before we'll know for sure. Always check with your doctor before starting any supplement, especially if you're already taking medications.

9. **Do Something New.** When you're depressed, you're in a rut. Push yourself to do something different. Go to a museum. Pick up a used book and read it on a park bench. Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Take a language class. "When we challenge ourselves to do something different, there are chemical changes in the brain," Cook says. "Trying something new alters the levels of [the brain chemical] dopamine, which is associated with pleasure, enjoyment, and learning."

10. **Try to Have Fun.** If you're depressed, make time for things you enjoy. What if nothing seems fun anymore? "That's just a symptom of depression," Cook says. You have to keep trying anyway. As strange as it might sound, you have to work at having fun. Plan things you used to enjoy, even if they feel like a chore. Keep going out with friends for dinner. When you're depressed, you can lose the knack for enjoying life, Cook says. You have to relearn how to do it. In time, fun things really will feel fun again.

<http://www.webmd.com/depression/features/natural-treatments?page=1>

Deep Breathing

Exercise:

Sit up straight. (Do not arch your back) First exhale completely through your mouth. Place your hands on your stomach, just above your waist. Breathe in slowly through your nose, pushing your hands out with your stomach. This ensures that you are breathing deeply. Imagine that you are filling your body with air from the bottom up.

Hold your breath to a count of two to five, or whatever you can handle. It is easier to hold your breath if you continue to hold out your stomach. Slowly and steadily breathe out through your mouth, feeling your hands move back in as you slowly contract your stomach, until most of the air is out. Exhalation is a little longer than inhalation.

After you get some experience you don't need to use your hands to check your breathing.

You can also do the above breathing exercise lying on your back. Deep breathing exercises can help you to relax before you go to sleep for the night, or fall back asleep if you awaken in the middle of the night.

You can also practice deep breathing exercises standing – e.g. while sitting in traffic, or standing in a lineup at the grocery store. If you are really tense and feel as if you are holding your breath, simply concentrate on slowly breathing in and out.

Emotional Regulation: Observing and Emotions

Name: _____ Date: _____

Emotion Name: _____ Intensity (0-100): _____

Prompting Event for my emotion: (What started the emotion?)

Interpretations (beliefs, assumptions, appraisals) of the situation:

Body changes and sensing: (What am I feeling/sensing in my body?)

Body Language: (What is my facial expression, posture or gestures?)

Action Urges: (What do I feel like doing? What do I want to say?)

Actions Taken: (What, specifically, did I do or say I the situation?)

Function of the emotion:

- What did the emotion communicate to others?
- How did the emotion influence others and/or their behavior
- How did the emotion organize or motivate you to do something?
- What information did the emotion give you? (How did it color your perception or lead you to any conclusions?)

Grounding Techniques Explained

By: Maryann Rigoni

WHAT IS GROUNDING?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies to detach from emotional pain (e.g., craving, anger, sadness). Distraction works by focusing outward on the external world, rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as “distraction,” “centering,” “a safe place,” “looking outward,” or “healthy detachment.”

WHY DO GROUNDING?

When you are overwhelmed with emotional pain, you need a way to detach so that you can gain control over your feelings and stay safe. Grounding “anchors” you to the present and to reality.

Many people with PTSD or those people, who are struggling with feeling overwhelming emotions and memories or those feeling numb with dissociation, benefit from grounding. In grounding, you attain a balance between the two: conscious of reality and able to tolerate it. Remember that pain is a feeling; it is not who you are. When you get caught up in it, it feels like you are your pain, and that is all that exists. But it is only one part of your experience-the others are just hidden and can be found again through grounding.

Guidelines

- Grounding can be done any time, any place, anywhere, and no one has to know.
- Use grounding when you are faced with a trigger, enraged, dissociating, having a craving, or whenever your emotional pain goes above 6 (on a 0-10 scale). Grounding puts healthy distance between you and these negative feelings.
- Keep your eyes open, scan the room, and turn the light on to stay in touch with the present.
- Rate your mood before and after grounding, to test whether it worked. Before grounding, rate your level of emotional pain (0-10, where 10 means “extreme pain”). Then re-rate it afterwards. Has it gone down?
- No talking about negative feelings or journal writing-you want to distract away from negative feelings, not get in touch with them.

- Stay neutral-avoid judgments of “good” and “bad.” For example, instead of “The walls are blue; I dislike blue because it reminds me of depression,” simply say “The walls are blue” and move on.
- Focus on the present, not the past or future.
- Note the grounding is not the same as relaxation training. Grounding is much more active, focuses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help extreme negative feelings. It is believed to be more effective than relaxation training for PTSD.

WAYS OF GROUNDING

There are three major ways of grounding, mental, physical, and soothing. “Mental” means focusing your mind; “physical” means focusing on your senses (e.g., touch, hearing); and “soothing” means talking to yourself in a very kind way. You may find that one type works better for you, or all types may be helpful.

Mental Grounding

Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses—for example, “The walls are white; there are five pink chairs; there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and the temperature. You can do this anywhere.

- Play a “categories” game with yourself. Try to think of “types of dogs,” “jazz musicians,” “states that begin with A...”
- Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example, describe the meal that you cook (e.g., “First I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters”)
- Imagine. Use an image: Glide along on skates away from your pain; change the TV channel to get to a better show; think of a wall as a buffer between you and your pain.
- Say a safety statement. “My name is _____; I am safe right now. I am in the present, not in the past.”
- Read something, saying each word to yourself or read each letter backward so that you focus on the letters and not on the meaning of the words.
- Use humor. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood. Count to 10 or say the alphabet, very s...l...o...w...l...y.

Physical Grounding

- Run cool or warm water over your hands.

- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.
- Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, the wall....
- Dig your heels into the floor-literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket, which you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Jump up and down
- Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; wiggle your toes in your socks; the feel of your chair against your back...
- Stretch. Roll your head around; extend your fingers...
- Clench and release your fists.
- Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left or “right”...
- Eat something, describing the flavors in detail to yourself.
- Focus on your breathing, notice each inhale and exhale.

Soothing Grounding

- Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a small child-for example, “you are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
- Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day...
- Picture people you care about (e.g., your children), look at a photograph.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song, quote, or poem.
- Remember a safe place. Describe the place that you find so soothing.
- Say a coping statement: “I can handle this.”
- Plan a safe treat for yourself, such as a certain desert.
- Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week-perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie.

WHAT IF GROUNDING DOES NOT WORK?

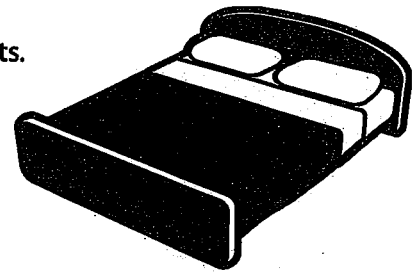
GROUNDING DOES WORK! But, like any other skill, you need to practice.

Practice as often as possible, even when you don’t need it. Try grounding for a loooooonnnnnnnngggggg time (20-30 minutes). Notice which methods you like best. Create your own methods of grounding. Start grounding early in a negative mood cycle.

<http://bsbwebsite.com/2012/12/19/grounding-techniques-explained/>

Guidelines For Better Sleep

Sleeping well is a habit that you can learn! Small changes can have big effects. Start today by following these rules:



Take care of your body

- Do not drink caffeine: no tea, coffee, or coca-cola after 4 o'clock
- Do not eat a big or spicy meal late in the evening
- Do not go to bed hungry
- Avoid alcohol as it interferes with sleep

Physical exercise, such as a brisk walk, in the late afternoon can help to make your body tired and help you to sleep. Try to do some exercise every day.

Sleep only at night-time and do not have day-time naps, no matter how tired you feel. Naps keep the problem going by making it harder for you to get to sleep the next night.

Having a regular bedtime routine teaches your body when it's time to go to sleep.

- Have a soothing drink like camomile tea or a milky drink
- Have a bath, or a routine of washing your face and brushing your teeth
- Go to bed at same time each night
- When in bed think of nice things (e.g. think of 5 nice things that happened that day – they might be big or small, such as a nice conversation, seeing the sunshine, or hearing nice music on the radio)
- Do a relaxed breathing exercise (one hand on stomach the other on your chest, deliberately slow your breathing, breathe deeply in your stomach instead of high in your chest)
- Try and wake up the same time every day, even if this is tiring to begin with

Coping with bad dreams can be difficult. Some people don't like relaxation before going to sleep, or are scared of letting go. If that is you, try these preparation techniques instead:

- Prepare yourself in case you have bad dreams by thinking of a bad dream then think of a different ending for it. Practice this new ending many times before going to sleep.
- Before going to sleep prepare to re-orient yourself when you wake from a bad dream.
- Remind yourself that you are at home, that you are safe. Imagine your street, buses, local shops.
- Put a damp towel or a bowl of water by the bed to splash your face, place a special object by the bed, such as a photograph, or a small soft toy.
- Practice imagining yourself waking up from a bad dream and reorienting yourself to the present, to safety by splashing your face, touching special object, having a bottle of rose or lavender essential oil to sniff, going to window to see surroundings.
- When you wake up from a bad dream- move your body if you can and reorient yourself immediately (touching an object, wetting face, going to the window, talk to yourself in a reassuring way)

Make your bedroom a pleasant place to be

- Get a nightlight
- Keep it clean and tidy
- Introduce pleasant smells such as a drop of lavender oil onto the pillow
- Get extra pillows
- Make sure that your home is safe e.g. doors locked, windows closed.

REMEMBER: Bed is for sleeping, so if you cannot sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do another activity elsewhere such as reading or listening to music (try and avoid TV as it can wake you up). After 15 minutes return to bed and try to sleep again. If you still can't sleep after 30 minutes get up again. Repeat this routine as many times as necessary and only use your bed for sleeping in.

Checklist For Better Sleep



Good sleep is influenced by many factors.
Record how many of these things you have done in the last week
and consider making changes to your routine.

Things that are known to make sleep worse

- Napping during the day
- Watching television in bed
- Using a device with a bright screen in the hour before bedtime (e.g. a smartphone, a laptop)
- Consuming drinks containing caffeine (includes tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks, hot chocolate)
 - *How many each day?*
 - *What time of the day was your last caffeinated drink? (try to avoid caffeine after 6pm)*
- Drinking alcohol (alcohol typically leads to interrupted sleep)
- Eating a heavy meal less than 3 hours before bedtime
- Staying in bed even if you can't fall asleep (it's better to get up and do something relaxing, then try again later)

Things that are known to improve sleep

- Regular exercise
 - *How many times a week? (it is recommended to do at least 3 x 30 minutes per week)*
 - *What time of the day? (it is best not to exercise in the 3-4 hours before bedtime)*
- Setting aside some 'worry time' each day to write down any issues that are bothering or concerning you, then deciding to leave those worries behind until tomorrow
(make sure to do this at least one hour before bedtime)
- Relaxation exercises (e.g. relaxed breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation)
- Having a relaxing bedtime routine (e.g. taking a bath or a shower, reading a comforting book)
- Setting the conditions for sleep
 - *Make sure the bedroom is completely dark (blackout curtains are cheap and effective)*
 - *Make sure the mattress and pillows are comfortable (make bed an attractive place to be!)*
 - *Make sure the bedroom is the right temperature (think like Goldilocks: not too hot, not too cold)*

Handling the Holidays

With a Little Planning you can Avoid Holiday Depression, Anxiety, and Mania—and Enjoy the Season.

By R. Morgan Griffin, WebMD Feature

The holidays can be a tricky for anyone, but some people may anticipate November and December holidays with real dread—and depression.

"The holidays can be very hard for people," says Raymond L. Crowel, PsyD, vice president for mental health and substance abuse services at the National Mental Health Association. You'll probably face loads of possible triggers: relatives, stress, exhaustion, and the temptation to overindulge, to name a few. Slipping into a mood swing may be much easier than usual.

So what should someone do when the holidays roll around? Be a Scrooge and opt out? Hibernate?

You don't have to do either. WebMD talked to experts about how people can weather the holidays—with tips on avoiding depression and mood swings, planning, enjoying the season, and more.

Why the Holidays Can Be Hard

Experts say many things come together to make the holidays tough for people including:

- **Disrupted Schedules.** "The biggest single problem with the holidays for people is that they take them out of their routine," says Ellen Frank, PhD, director of the depression and manic depression prevention program at the University of Pittsburgh's Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic.

Studies show that people do best when they're on a schedule—getting up, eating, exercising, and going to bed at roughly the same time each day. Even the loss of just one night of sleep can trigger a mood swing. But during the holidays—when you may be traveling across time zones, partying, or staying up until the wee hours—it's all too easy to get off track.

- **Over-Stimulation.** Shopping, decorating, and preparing for the holidays can leave you excited and anxious. Some family reunions aren't always happy. Any excess stimulation can trigger a swing toward holiday depression or mania.
- **Shorter Days and Longer Nights.** Some people find their mood swings are related to the seasons. Depression is more common in the fall and winter in the northern hemisphere, says Michael E. Thase, MD, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

- **Holiday "Cheer".** The holidays are a time when excessive drinking is often tolerated, even encouraged. Though unwinding with alcohol can be tempting, it can be bad for some people. Not only can it interfere with medicine, it may also ruin sleep and make you more prone to mood swings.
- **Excessive Spending.** It's the season when it seems everyone is running up their credit cards. If you have a history of excessive spending and grandiose gift-giving during hypomanic or manic episodes, you are clearly at risk.
- **Missing your Medication.** When you're busy, it's easy to forget about your medication. You may even feel tempted to skip a few doses on purpose: it might make it easier to tolerate alcohol, or being a little hypomanic may give you the energy to get errands done. But skipping your medication is always risky, since it makes your mood less stable.
- **Believing the Hype.** We all know how we're supposed to feel at the holidays: brimming with joy, good will, and love. But a lot of us don't really feel that way. Being depressed during the holidays can really make you feel out of step, which adds to feelings of isolation.

Planning for Holiday Success

It's very easy to let the holidays dictate your life. You *have* to go shopping. You *have* to go to your office party. You *have* to bake four batches of Christmas cookies. It can make you feel completely powerless. Your own needs become irrelevant.

The key is to take control before that happens. "Where is it written that you *must* do all these things?" says Frank. The key to a successful holiday is to plan for it well in advance, she says. Here are a few tips that may help ease your holidays:

- **Scale Back your Expectations.** Be easy on yourself. "The gifts don't have to be perfect," Crowel tells WebMD. Neither do the decorations. Or the turkey. Or *anything*.
- **Think Twice Before Playing Host.** The preparations for a holiday dinner—shopping, cooking, cleaning—can be overwhelming. So make sure you are really up to it. If you do host, simplify. Pare down the guest list. Cook something you can prepare in advance. Ask for help from friends or family.
- **Be Open and Direct with your Family.** Tell them what you need this year. If the usual family gathering of dozens seems like too much, see if your family might cut down the guest list. Obviously, this could cause conflict with the rest of the family. But if the extended family members really care about the person they should understand, Frank says.

- **Make this year different.** If holidays have not gone well in the past, make changes. Instead of doing the usual dinner at home, go to a restaurant. If staying with your in-laws hasn't been good for you, check into a nearby hotel instead. Or simply get away from all of the holiday hubbub and go on vacation.
- **Spread Out the Visiting.** Frank suggests shifting some of your visits into October and January, instead of trying to fit in everyone in November and December.
- **Increase the Number of Check-Ins.** You might want to step up the schedule of appointments with your therapist or check-ins with your family and friends. It's a good way of staying grounded.

Facing Holiday Parties

For a lot of people, it's the holiday get-togethers—family dinners, office parties, neighborhood caroling expeditions—that cause the most anxiety. Here are some tips for getting through them unscathed.

- **Say "No" Sometimes.** "Don't overbook yourself," says Crowel. Most of us have more holiday obligations than we can handle. Decide which ones are most important and which aren't. Some events may simply be overwhelming. It's okay to say "no".
- **Have an Ally.** If going to a party is making you anxious, go with a friend, relative, or co-worker. Arrive and depart together. And your partner could watch your back, helping you avoid alcohol and other temptations.
- **Leave Early.** Going to a party doesn't mean you have to stay all night. Decide beforehand when you'd like to leave and stick to it. Even stopping in for just a few minutes is okay. Having a getaway plan may relieve a lot of anxiety.
- **Stick to your Schedule.** If you're having fun, of course you don't want to leave a party to make your bedtime. But you need to follow your regular non-holiday schedule as closely as possible. And make sure to keep up your normal exercise routine too—or at least get out for quick walks.
- **Try Not to Overindulge.** It's hard, but you really must stay away from alcohol, especially if you've had problems with it in the past. And despite the allure of all those sweets, try to stick to your normal diet.
- **Weigh the Pros and Cons.** Even if it makes you anxious, it's generally a good idea to try going to your family's holiday dinner. But there are exceptions. "If you have a really stormy family history, and seeing your family tends to trigger problems, then staying away could be the right move," says Thase.

But make this decision carefully. Weigh the benefits and the risks. Can you handle the guilt of not going? Most importantly, make sure you have something else planned. Don't just say no and then spend the holidays alone.

Shopping Sensibly

It's very easy to get caught up in the frenzy of the season and become fixated on finding everyone the perfect gift. But again, you need to stay in control -- especially if you're prone to unhealthy buying sprees. Here are some suggestions:

- **Keep Perspective.** Don't get too caught up in finding the best gift for everyone. It's not worth the anxiety—and besides, your nephew would probably be happy with a check anyway.
- **Stick to a Budget.** If you have a problem with overspending, come up with an explicit budget well before the holidays arrive. You may want the aid of a friend or family member to help you stick to it.
- **Spread out the Shopping.** Try to shop ahead. Frank suggests Halloween (or earlier, if you can manage it) as a great time to start looking.
- **Shop Online.** If you have access to the Internet, online shopping is a low-stress way to avoid the mall's hassles. For a little extra, some sites may even gift wrap.
- **Go for Gift Certificates.** Just about everyone loves a gift certificate and they don't have to be impersonal. Choose one that fits the person: get your sister one from her favorite boutique and your uncle one from a restaurant he likes.

Caring for Yourself

The holidays are a time when we're encouraged to think about other people instead of ourselves. That's fine, to a point. But if you focus so much on other people that you neglect yourself, you're at higher risk of descending into mania or depression. That's not good for anyone.

"Your first order of business during the holidays has to be taking care of yourself," says Thase. "If you don't, all sorts of bad things can happen." "Just as diabetics can't eat all of the sweets during the holidays, people have to take extra precautions," he tells WebMD. "But if you take those precautions, the holidays really can go well."

So this holiday season, plan ahead, keep to your schedule, and scale back your expectations. If you do, you can beat holiday depression, mania, anxiety, and hassles—and enjoy the season. That's good for you as a person—and for your loved ones too.

<http://www.webmd.com/bipolar-disorder/features/bipolar-disorder-handling-the-holidays>

Mindfulness Can Help Adults Overcome Childhood Trauma

By RICK NAUERT PHD Senior News Editor

Reviewed by John M. Graham, Psy.D. on September 15, 2014

The first study to examine the relationship between childhood adversity, mindfulness, and health suggests adults who are mindful in the moment have better health.

The finding is important as adults who were abused or neglected as children are known to have poorer health.

Researchers discovered adults who tend to focus on and accept their reactions to the present moment — or are mindful — report having better health, regardless of their childhood adversity.

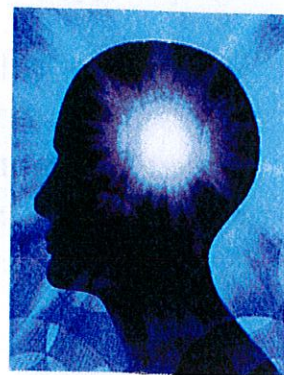
In a study to be published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, Robert Whitaker, M.D., M.P.H., and colleagues surveyed 2,160 adults working in Head Start, the nation's largest federally-funded early childhood education program.

Survey respondents, who worked in 66 Pennsylvania Head Start programs, were asked if they experienced any of eight types of childhood adversity, such as being abused or having a parent with alcoholism or drug addiction.

In addition, respondents were asked questions about their current health, as well their mindfulness, meaning their tendency in daily life to pay attention to what is happening in the moment and to be aware of and accepting of their thoughts and feelings.

Nearly one-fourth of those surveyed reported three or more types of adverse childhood experiences, and almost 30 percent reported having three or more stress-related health conditions like [depression](#), headache, or back pain, noted the researchers.

However, the risk of having multiple health conditions was nearly 50 percent lower among those with the highest level of mindfulness



compared to those with the lowest. This was true even for those who had multiple types of childhood adversity.

“Regardless of the amount of childhood adversity, those who were more mindful also reported significantly better health behaviors, like getting enough [sleep](#), and better functioning, such as having fewer days per month when they felt poorly — either mentally or physically,” said Whitaker, professor of public health and pediatrics at Temple University.

“Our results suggest that mindfulness may provide some resilience against the poor adult health outcomes that often result from childhood trauma,” he said.

“Mindfulness training may help adults, including those with a history of childhood trauma, to improve their own well-being and be more effective with children.”

“Many smaller studies have shown that learning mindfulness practices like meditation can improve psychological and physical symptoms such as depression and pain. But more research is needed to see if interventions to increase mindfulness can improve the health and functioning of those who have had adverse childhood experiences,” Whitaker said.

With nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults reporting one or more types of adverse childhood experiences, Whitaker noted that “mindfulness practices could be a promising way to reduce the high costs to our society that result from the trauma adults experienced during childhood.”

<http://psychcentral.com/news/2014/09/15/mindfulness-can-help-adults-overcome-childhood-trauma/74911.html>

Mindfulness

Ever wonder where our good and enjoyable times go as we rush through life? Do you find that you spend a great deal of your time upset over the past or worried about the future, while the present just seems to slip by? Is your mind racing, thinking ahead, worrying, judging and feeling anxious or even overwhelmed? Do you often put yourself on automatic pilot?

Most of us are multitaskers. It is what we do to accomplish everything we expect of ourselves—working, volunteering; helping our children, partners, friends, or aging parents. Then there are concerns about the economy and the world situation. The results?—we feel pressured, stressed, and unable to concentrate. We rush through activities without paying attention, snack and overeat without noticing, and listen to friends or colleagues without really hearing them.

Mindfulness is a strategy to keep your attention in the present moment. The goal is simply to observe—with no intention of changing or improving anything. Mindfulness supports living each and every moment to the fullest possible. It is an attitude about life as well as a relaxation technique.

Mindfulness is the practice (and it takes a lot of practice) of purposely focusing your attention on the present without drifting into concerns about the past or the future or getting caught up in making judgments about what is happening.

Mindfulness is a means of observing and accepting what is occurring in this moment of time. Accepting life and ourselves just as it is right now, with all of the positives and negatives, often leads to increased confidence, calmer moods, and enhanced coping skills. Mindfulness is awareness of the moment—that is something that can be used at any time and place such as working, talking, playing, or eating. Tune into the present moment is what mindfulness is all about.

Mindfulness in Daily Life

- ◆ Make common daily tasks—answering the phone or buckling your seatbelt—a reminder to focus on the present moment; think about what you are doing, and observe yourself doing it.
- ◆ Pay attention to your breathing when you stop at red lights.
- ◆ Find a task you usually do impatiently or unconsciously—like waiting in line or brushing your teeth—and devote your full attention to the thoughts, sensations, and feelings you are experiencing.
- ◆ When you do the dishes—Do the Dishes!
- ◆ Remember how you react to a given situation is ultimately more important than the situation itself!

Tips for Mindfulness

- ◆ Remember to turn off the automatic pilot response
- ◆ Focus on the sensations you are experiencing
- ◆ Live each second as fully as you can
- ◆ Attend to the here and now
- ◆ Observe the thought and do not judge them
- ◆ When your thoughts wander, refocus on your breathing
- ◆ Ride the present wave(Do not fight the waves.)
- ◆ Practice mindfulness in everyday situations
- ◆ The goal of mindfulness is to observe.

Scientific evidence suggests mindfulness can increase enjoyment of life and improve emotional and physical health. Mindfulness techniques can help relieve stress and alleviate conditions such as high blood pressure, chronic pain, sleep problems, and gastrointestinal difficulties. People who practice mindfulness say they are less preoccupied with success and self-esteem and more open to deep connections with others. Many psychotherapists now incorporate mindfulness practices in the treatment of problems such as depression, substance abuse, couples' conflicts, and anxiety disorders. Mindfulness does not replace traditional therapies and medications, but it may help these treatments to work better.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

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

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

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

Preparation

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

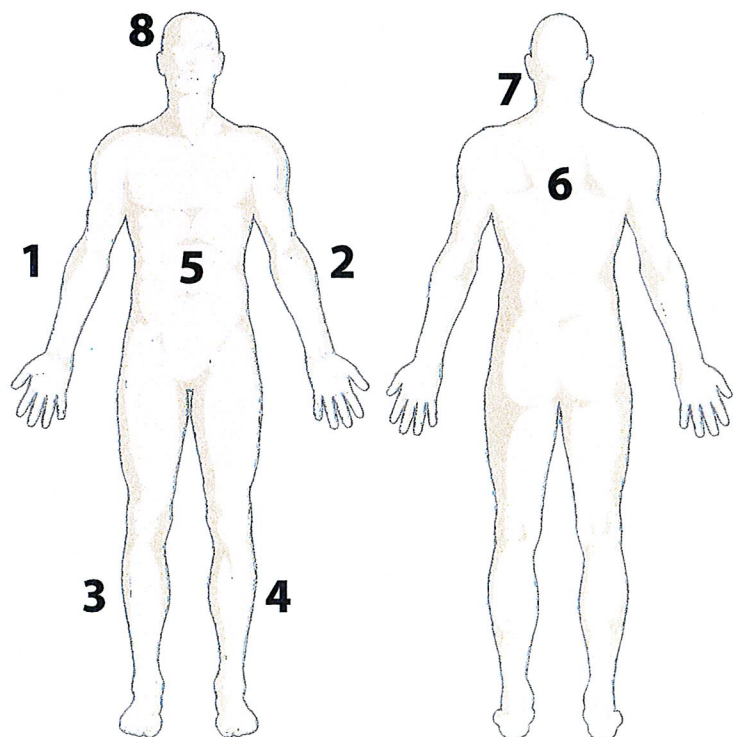
Instructions

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

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

Recommended sequence

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



The Seven Pillars of Mindfulness

Non Judging

Mindfulness is developed by being an impartial witness to our own experience impartially. This requires standing back and observing our own thoughts. A great way to practice this is observing your own breathing.

Patience

Patience is considered to be a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept that sometimes things must unfold in their own way and in their own time. Take for example the Butterfly chrysalis if someone were to interrupt the process of the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis, even with the best intentions, the butterfly would never have the strength to fly.

Beginners Mind

Often what we 'already know' can get in the way of seeing things as they really are. Try attempting to experience everything as a new experience even if it is the old same activity. Even routine activities are a new experience because every moment is a brand new moment. This prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise. Try this experiment with a spouse or partner, a co-worker, or even on the drive home from work.

Trust

Cultivating trust in your own inner wisdom is an essential part of mindfulness practice. Learning to honor your feelings and intuition when something does not feel right is a fundamental aspect of cultivating inner wisdom. When practicing mindfulness you are taking responsibility for yourself and learning to listen and trust your own being. The more you trust yourself the easier it will be to trust others. This is particularly useful in the practice of yoga, or any other form of exercise you do. You need to pay attention to your body, back off or stop particular stretches.

Non-Striving

There is purpose in almost everything we do. Either striving to get something or somewhere. In meditation this attitude is actually an obstacle. It involves practice and energy in non-doing, there is no other goal other than for you to be yourself where ever you are at. This paradoxical thinking may sound crazy, especially because most people embarked on the mindfulness journey to reduce pain and/or stress. However if you were to actually sit down and say, 'Now I am going to now reduce my stress and pain, or both by doing this meditation', you have introduced the idea into your mind of where you should be as aposed to just being where you are.

Acceptance

Acceptance means seeing things as they truly are in the present moment. Quite often times we deny or resist what is - especially if we don't like it. Unfortunately, by not accepting we are spending much of our energy trying to force something to be different. This can create more tension and prevent positive things from occurring. Acceptance does not mean you have to take a passive attitude towards everything and abandon your principals and values. It simply means you are no longer resisting.

Letting go

Often our minds get can get caught up on a certain thought or idea, despite our knowledge of that no good can come of these particular thoughts, we continue to focus on them. Alternatively there can be certain thoughts or emotions that we try to avoid. In Mindfulness we try to just experience things as they are. Letting go is a way of letting things be as they are. Consider what outcomes you are attached too, and see if you can practice non-attachment. Try letting the experience be what it is and just experience it moment by moment. A good example of letting go is falling asleep. We have to let go of our thoughts and our tension in our body in order to go to sleep.

Try These Cognitive Restructuring Exercises to Improve Your Mood and Reduce Stress



Cognitive restructuring is a core part of [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) (CBT). CBT is one of the most effective psychological treatments for common problems like depression, anxiety disorders, and binge eating. Here, clinical and social psychologist Alice Boyes shares some CBT techniques you can try at home to reduce problems with mood, anxiety, and stress.

Practice Noticing When You're Having a Cognitive Distortion

Choose one type of [cognitive distortion](#) to focus on at a time. Example: you recognize that you're prone to "negative predictions." For a week, just notice any times you find yourself making a negative prediction—for example, you might notice yourself expecting not to enjoy a party, expecting to feel too tired to exercise, expecting that your boss won't like an idea, etc.

When you find yourself having the cognitive distortion, ask yourself: what other ways you could think? For the negative predictions example, you might ask yourself what other outcomes are possible. Try these three questions: What's the worst possible thing that could happen? What's the best possible thing that could happen? What's the most realistic?

Track the Accuracy of a Thought

Example: Your rumination-related thought is "If I think a lot about my problem, it'll help me find a solution." For this example, you might write down each time you notice yourself ruminating (overthinking) in one column, and in a second column note if the rumination actually led to useful problem solving.

At the end of the week, determine what percentage of the times you ruminated it led to useful problem solving? Another great idea is to record the approximate number of minutes you were ruminating each time you notice it. Then you can determine how many minutes of rumination you did for each useful problem solving idea.

Behaviorally Testing Your Thought

Example: Your thought is "I don't have time to take breaks." For a week (week 1), you could follow your usual routine and at the end of each day, rate your productivity on a 0-10 scale. For week 2, you could take a five minute break every 60 minutes and do the same ratings. You would then compare your productivity ratings across the two weeks.

Evaluate the Evidence For/Against Your Thought

Example: Your thought is "I can never do anything right." You could write one column of objective evidence (column A) that supports the idea that you can never do anything right, and one column of objective evidence that your thought is not true (column B).

Then, you'd write a couple of balanced thoughts that accurately reflect the evidence, for example: "I've made some mistakes that I feel embarrassed about but a lot of the time, I make good choices." You don't need to completely believe the new thoughts. For a start, just experiment with trying them on for size.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation involves picking a focus of attention, such as your breathing. For a set number of minutes, you focus on experiencing the sensations of your breathing, as opposed to thinking "about" your breathing.

Whenever any thoughts come into your mind, gently (and without self-criticism) bring your attention back to experiencing the sensations of your breathing. Mindfulness meditation isn't specifically a tool for cognitive restructuring but it's a great way to train yourself to be mindful (aware) of when you've become lost in thought. Mindful awareness of what thoughts you're having is an essential first step in cognitive restructuring.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion involves talking to yourself kindly whenever you have a sense of suffering. Like mindfulness meditation, self-compassion isn't specifically a tool for cognitive restructuring, but it has that effect.

Example: you've done something silly and normally you'd call yourself a "stupid idiot." Instead you take a self-compassion approach. You acknowledge you've made a mistake, that you feel embarrassed, and that this is part of the universal human experience. Over time, if you replace self-criticism with self-compassion, your thoughts will change. As you do this, you might notice your thoughts about other people becoming kinder and more accepting too.

<http://lifehacker.com/5980491/try-these-cognitive-restructuring-exercises-to-improve-your-mood-and-reduce-stress>