

Mindfulness Exercises

Dear Utah Geriatric Education Consortium Partners,

This is a stressful time for all of us, especially those of you providing care for older adults in long-term care, assisted living and home health. When you are taking care of others, it is hard to remember how important it is to take care of yourself.

However, if you can take even a few moments to pay attention to your own physical and emotional health, you are better prepared to support others. Because your health and well-being are important to us, we have put together some short “mindfulness moments” you can do for yourself and teach those you care for. In addition, we’ve provided links to resources that you can use and share.

Please know that our team is dedicated to supporting your educational needs through this crisis. Please reach out if there are other topics you would like to know more about.

Warm regards,



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Six Short Mindfulness Exercises for Daily Practice

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You may find each of these helpful in invoking a sense of calm and wellness, and they can be powerful stress relievers. Please approach each with curiosity and patience, a beginner's mind. They are in no particular order.

Box Breath

Focus on your breath. Note its natural rhythm for a few breath cycles. When you are ready, count how long your inbreath is. Then work on exhaling for the same count. After another breath cycle or two, begin adding a hold at the top of the breath (after the inbreath, before the outbreath) for the same count as your inbreath and outbreath. After the outbreath, add a hold as well, for the same count. Then begin the cycle again, breathing in. Practice this box breath – breathing in, holding the breath, breathing out, holding the pause – for several cycles. Note any changes in your thoughts, emotions, or physical body.

RAIN Meditation

RAIN is an acronym to remember when you are experiencing difficult feelings. Each letter's meaning helps us direct our attention in the following ways:

R is for *recognize*. Recognize what is happening. Name it. Let it feel real, even though it may be intense.

A is for *allow*. Allow it to be what it is. Instead of trying to escape, or push away the unpleasantness, simply let it be what it is.

I is for *investigate*. Sometimes recognizing and allowing may be enough to instill calm feelings. However sometimes it is time to investigate. Our tendency can be toward avoidance instead of investigation, so choose to investigate your feelings with a sense of kindness and gentleness. What are the beliefs behind them? Is something underneath? Be a tender detective.

N is for *nurture* – nurture with self-compassion. What have you discovered? What do you need now? Imagine yourself comforting another person, perhaps a child. Can you give yourself the same compassionate comfort? How is this experience different for you than the typical ways you may have been conditioned to react?

Body Scan

This is an exercise for which you will need a bit of time, but it will be worth it! Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and close your eyes.

- Begin by focusing on your breath. Breathe in whatever you would welcome: peace, health, comfort, energy... allow it to flow into all parts of your body – torso, legs and arms, neck and head, hands and feet. With your exhale, feel relaxation flowing through your body. Allow your body to settle; feel the weight of your body anchoring you.
- You will now begin bringing your attention throughout your body, one step at a time. Begin by focusing on your feet. What do you notice? Are they tingly, heavy, light, numb?
- Move to your calves and shins, taking slow, deep breaths. What are the sensations? Allow yourself to breathe deeply into each body part, and when it feels settled move to the next. This can take several breaths with each body part.
- Follow this pattern through the upper legs, hips, belly. Notice where it feels more comfortable or less comfortable. What feels really good? We have a tendency to focus on what hurts or is bothering us... but where does your body feel great? Take time to notice.
- Move slowly through the ribs, shoulders and chest, and follow along up the spine as well. Bring your breath and attention out to your arms, hands, and fingers. Up your neck, across the face, into the skull.
- When you feel you have attended to each part of you, take a few more deep breaths in full body awareness. Gently rouse yourself and reminisce about your exploration.

STOP Meditation

STOP is another acronym to help you remember the steps of the process of this meditation. As with any mindfulness, the idea is to improve awareness and acceptance.

S stands for "Stop". Stop what you are doing.

T represents "Take a breath". You may recognize how focusing on your breath allows you to stay in the present, and holds the space between your thoughts and your actions.

O is for "Observe". Step into the role of observer. Observe your thoughts without being swept up in them. Observe your emotions – name what you are feeling without reacting. Observe your body – are you tight, clenched, fidgety, in pain?

P indicates "Proceed". Move forward now with something that supports you. Affirmations, a pleasant conversation, massaging your hands – it can look however you like it to look.

Metta Meditation

This is a simple and beautiful meditation that you will build on over time. Metta meditation is also referred to as loving kindness meditation.

- You will begin by practicing it toward yourself. Begin by sitting or lying down with soft attention. Repeat aloud or in your mind, *May I be safe. May I be well. May I be happy and at ease.* You are practicing well-being toward yourself. Feel the sensations and trust the words. Allow the words to wash over you and fill you. You can use similar phrases if you prefer. Practice this often.

- When you feel ready to build your practice, you will add a step. After practicing toward yourself, think of someone you love. Speak or think the words directed toward them. *May you be safe. May you be well. May you be happy and at ease.* Allow yourself to feel the meaning of the words, enjoy giving the gift that they contain. Again, build this practice over time.
- When you feel ready, you may expand to others you know, perhaps someone you feel neutral toward. *May you be safe. May you be well. May you be happy and at ease.* Again, build this practice. Explore people to direct your practice toward.
- The later step of metta is to direct this loving kindness toward someone you may have less than loving feeling towards. Explore directing these phrases toward the person. *May you be safe. May you be well. May you be happy and at ease.* This is something to build up toward as you feel more and more comfortable with the practice itself, and there is never a rush or a hurry.

Vishama Vritti Breathing

Without Holds

- Start by counting how long it takes for you to comfortably complete an inhale. Count at your own pace (this helps you find your own internal beat). Take several breath cycles to find your number or an average number.
- Inhale, count to your number; let your body expand three dimensionally as you allow your breath to stretch you from the inside out; feel expansion to the front, back, right, left, down, up and all diagonals between. Feel your body stretch from the inside out.
- Pause full (without strain)
- Exhale very slowly so you count to a higher number on your exhale than your inhale (some examples are 2 counts longer, 1.5X longer or 2X longer—it depends on how fast you are counting). Exhale without collapsing. If exhaling longer is not possible, exhale equally.
- Pause empty
- Repeat as long as you want.

With Holds– this is a variation on Square Breathing called Trapezoidal Breathing. *Note that holding the breath in or out in square breathing (sometimes called box breathing) and trapezoidal breathing is contraindicated for people with high blood pressure or extreme anxiety. People with high blood pressure or extreme anxiety should use the one above with the pauses—not the holds.*

- Start by counting how long it take for you to comfortably complete an inhale. Count at your own pace (this helps you find your own internal beat). Take several breath cycles to find your number or an average number.
- Inhale, count to your number; let your body expand three dimensionally as you allow your breath to stretch you from the inside out; feel expansion to the front, back, right, left, down, up and all diagonals between. Feel your body stretch from the inside out.
- Hold full for the same counts as your inhale. Stay expanded on the hold.
- Exhale very slowly so you count to a higher number on your exhale than your inhale (some examples are 2 counts longer, 1.5X longer or 2X longer—it depends on how fast you are counting). Exhale without collapsing. If exhaling longer is not possible, exhale equally.
- Hold empty for the same counts as your inhale. Stay with the expanded feeling.
- Repeat as long as you want. Note that you may need to alter your inhale count to have this pattern work. The only side that is longer is your exhale.

Additional Resources

Below are some resources that can bring you comfort and peace of mind during this uneasy time.

- Ten Percent Happier Podcast- <https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide>
- U of U's Wellness and Integrative Health YouTube Channel- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKDKw_0FFHzEaWmzsEfWsOw
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Stream- <https://laughingsquid.com/live-video-streams-from-monterey-bay-aquarium/>
- Live Cameras at the San Diego Zoo- <https://zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams>
- Daily, Free Meditations for Adults and Kids- <https://free.health.journeys.com>



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