Mindfulness Exercises

**Traditional Mindfulness Meditation:** a meditation sitting of some length

A meditation sitting can be challenging and it helps to start off with a short amount of time (2-5 minutes). In a sitting, it helps to have an anchor to help ground you (see anchors below). **With any mediation practice it is important to normalize that your mind will wander and to be compassionate towards yourself.**

**Breathing exercises:** diaphragmatic breathing (“belly breathing”)

This breath is accomplished by breathing deeply into your lungs by flexing your diaphragm; this is in contrast with the more typical breathing shallowly and flexing your rib cage. This deep breathing is marked by the expansion of the stomach rather than the chest. This breathing is considered a healthier and fuller way to bring oxygen into your body. In order to be “belly breathing” you need to **fully relax** all of the muscles in the stomach. This is best practiced while lying on your back as you get used to the new sensation. When practicing “belly breathing”, use anchors to help you focus (see anchors below).

**Visualization exercises:**

Imagine a safe or relaxing place in exquisite detail: the smells, sounds, sights, etc. These types of exercises can be helpful in preparing for important events such as a test, performance, public speaking, athletic competition, etc. This can also be a great exercise if you are feeling homesick; take an **imagined** visit home for a few minutes.

**Body oriented exercises:**

Try doing a body scan, passive muscle relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, etc.

**Active exercises:**

Examples include walking meditation, doing an activity with mindful awareness (e.g. playing piano, running, knitting, karate, yoga, household chore, etc.).

**Sensory awareness exercises:**

Use one or more of your senses to fully take in an object (e.g. mindful eating, taking a shower, putting on hand lotion, etc.)

**The pause:**

Take a moment to stop, breathe, center yourself, and recognize the intention of the moment.

**An anchor can be:**

- Noticing an aspect of your breath (e.g. feeling your inhale, feeling your exhale, feeling the pause in between each breath)
- Focusing on a physical sensation (e.g. feeling your sitting bones on the ground, feeling your feet on the floor, feeling your stomach expand with your breath, etc.)
- Repeating a mantra (“I am / at peace” “I am / calm” “I am / grateful” “Just me / in this place” etc.)
- Counting
- Anything that helps center you and bring you peace…
“Mini” Relaxation Exercises

Mini relaxation exercises are focused breathing techniques which help you reduce anxiety and tension immediately. You can do them with your eyes open or closed. You can do them any place, at any time; no one will know you’re doing them.

Ways to do a mini...
Switch to diaphragmatic breathing; if you are having trouble, try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in, and falling about an inch as you breathe out. If this is still difficult for you, lie on your back or on your stomach; you will be more aware of your breathing patter. Remember, it is impossible to breathe diaphragmatically if you are holding your stomach in. So… relax your stomach muscles.

Mini Version 1
Count very slowly to yourself from ten down to zero, one number for each full breath. Thus, with each diaphragmatic breath, you say “ten” to yourself, with the next breath, you say “nine” etc. If you start feeling light-headed or dizzy, slow down the counting. When you get to “zero”, see how you are feeling. If you are feeling better, great! If not, try doing it again.

Mini Version 2
As you inhale, count very slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself, “one, two, three, four,” as you exhale, you say to yourself “four, three, two, one.” Do this several times.

Mini Version 3
After each inhalation, pause for a few second; after you exhale, pause again for a few seconds. Do this for several breaths.

Good times to “do a mini”
• When you’re overwhelmed by what you need to accomplish… while waiting in line or waiting for a bus… when someone says something that bothers you… while stuck in traffic… when put on “hold” during an important phone call… while in your doctor’s waiting room… at all red lights… while waiting for a phone call… when in the dentists’ chair… when in pain…

The only time “minis” don’t work if when you forget to do them!! So, go try a mini…