

# A short guide to

## Managing Stress and anxiety and building emotional resilience

### 1 Introduction

If we are to build emotional resilience in times of stress unusual behaviour patterns such as the current COVID-19 Lockdown, we need to focus on 5 areas to:-

- Reduce Stress by Deliberately Relaxing
- Change our thinking
- Prioritize Good Quality Sleep
- Have Adequate Nutrition
- Set Goals to Get Primal Needs Met

When we do something different by adopting & prioritizing new habits and making lifestyle changes, we can lead a balanced and fulfilling life which will make us more resilient during times of difficulty and less likely to spiral into depression.

### 2 Stress and Anxiety

Prolonged anxiety (often labelled Stress) is harmful to our health. Anxiety is a natural response with physical and psychological consequences. It feeds negative thoughts and vice versa.

### 3 The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

The ANS has two main branches:-



**Sympathetic** – The anxiety response is for our survival – our ancestors had a high chance of encountering a wild animal. Nowadays anxiety is more abstract – not a physical threat – eg final mortgage demand, waiting for results of medical tests, upcoming job interview.

Anxiety is accompanied by bodily changes that prepare you to run or fight – heart beat and blood pressure rise, blood is pumped to muscles. Blood is reduced to head, gut, skin, hands and feet to minimize bleeding if you are injured. Sweat increases to cool the body ready for fight and may have urge to defecate or vomit (this stops predators wanting to eat us)

#### What happens

Adrenaline is produced  
Digestion and salivation get switched off  
sex drive is switched off  
Immune function diminishes  
Growth hormone is turned off

Higher logical thought is turned off – we don't need to be intellectual when fleeing an attack. Not the time to be thinking "how dangerous is this"  
 Blood sugar is made available to be used up quickly – we can get a dip in energy

This is OK short term (a few minutes) If longer cortisol is produced – our long-term stress hormone and it is harmful to our health and has a negative impact on our thinking.



**Parasympathetic** – calms you down – endorphins (feel-good hormones) we get this through relaxation – meditation, slow breathing, light physical activity, promotes energy storage, digestion, healing of tissue in the body. Slows heart rate and diverts blood away from the muscles towards system maintenance processes.

#### 4 Abnormal Signs of Anxiety - How do we know whether anxiety levels are normal or not?

- anxious feelings that are out of proportion of danger
- anxiety that interferes with your work, pleasure and relationships
- anxiety that interferes with effective problem solving

We can all experience the above occasionally but if it is regular then it negatively impacts on our physical and mental health.

#### 5 Reversing the symptoms of anxiety

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Little or no saliva     | Encourage saliva production - chew gum   |
| All or nothing thinking | Ignore or question all-or-nothing thinking<br>Reduce worrying  |
| Taut hard muscles       | Get to know how it feels when body is tense – after relaxation deliberately tense muscles and feel the difference<br>Yoga, Tai chi |
| Rapid panting breathing | Breathe in a relaxed way 7/11  |

Benefits Of Relaxation	Relaxation Is Essential To:-
Breathing slows down	Help your body to be balanced
Blood flows back to digestive system	

Muscles relax		Sleep Better
Immune system works better		Give your brain a break
Extends concentration		Help you think more clearly
Creativity increases		

## 6 The Importance of Relaxation

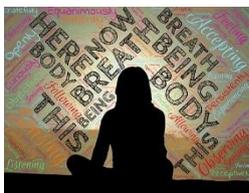
Helps your body to be balanced

Sleep Better

Helps you think more clearly

Gives your brain a break

### 6.1 7/11 Breathing



When we breathe in too quickly it mobilizes sympathetic nervous system – when we are nervous we gulp air – too much oxygen – needs a certain amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in order to uptake oxygen effectively – that is why people who are having a panic/anxiety attack breathe into a paper bag – they are re-inhaling their own CO<sub>2</sub> to restore the balances.

When we breathe **in** for longer than we breathe out – **increases anxiety**

When we breathe **out** for longer than we breathe in – **decreases anxiety** – it mobilizes **parasympathetic** nervous system

**Practice 2 minutes twice a day until you are confident that you can relax yourself with it whenever you need to. Do it:- Lying in bed @ night, sitting on toilet, while watching tv.**



Any time you find yourself worrying do 7/11 breathing

#### Meditation Practices

Set aside 10 – 15 minutes every day at a time and place where you are not going to be disturbed. It is quite normal for the mind to wander! It is best to practice in a sitting position where you are well supported. Some people have difficulty staying awake therefore it is not a good idea to practice while lying on your bed. Your mind is conditioned to let go and sleep when lying on your bed. Start with Awareness of Breath meditation whilst beginning your practice because it is shorter.



### 6.2 Physical Activity

- walking, yoga, dancing, climbing stairs, cycling, cleaning, gardening, washing car/windows

**30 minutes per day reduces risk of stroke**

**Benefits**

Increases self-esteem  
improves mood  
Reduces anxiety levels  
Increases ability to handle stress  
improves sleep patterns



### 6.3 Mind/Body Connection

Our body experiences thoughts as facts.  
Physical symptoms of stress are experienced in the body

### 6.4 Sleep Tips



- Do not eat within two hours prior to retiring. Your digestive system needs time to become restful before bedtime.
- Allow yourself time to wind down – warm bath etc. Do not work right up until bedtime listen to quiet relaxing music – spiritual reading etc
- Do not watch tv in bed
- Do not read or listen to disturbing news reports – all this negativity is upsetting and could cause the mind to dwell on negativity
- Cease taking medication for insomnia – you are reinforcing the belief that you have a problem – this is a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Practice belly breathing/yoga breathing prior to trying to sleep. You are clearing the body of toxins that have built up during the day. Do 10 – 12 such long slow deep breaths.
- Do not drink alcohol within 2 hours before retiring.

- Do not drink caffeine after 4 pm
- No rigorous exercise within 1 hour of retiring.

## 6.5 Nutrition



The way you feel and subsequently act can be heavily influenced by the food you eat, and how your body deals with that food according to its overall health.

**blood sugar imbalance** – food is turned into glucose, - body and brain’s source of energy. If glucose levels are too high or too low it can cause problems. It stores it (in muscles and liver) if there is too much and then releases it if levels plummet. If glucose levels rise and the storage compartments are full the body releases insulin and stores the excess as fat, until the body needs to convert it back for energy.

If we do not eat regularly, or eat foods that release too much insulin this can have an effect on the body, causing mood changes and a range of physical symptoms – jitters or feeling light headed and lethargic.

Glycaemic Index is a score which is based upon how quickly it converts to glucose after being consumed)

High GI foods convert to glucose quickly and trigger insulin production – lower GI have a gentler effect on insulin release.

**Low GI** – meat, protein foods, fish, dairy to whole grains, vegetables – converts **slowly** –

Foods that convert **quickly** and should be avoided - sugar, white flour, white pasta, juices, fizzy sugary drinks, white breads, cakes and biscuits. Stressed people crave carbohydrates for immediate energy as their body perceives a threat and will require quickly converting food. This has a roller coaster effect – blood sugar rises causing insulin to be released and then blood sugar falls away quickly. Adrenalin is pushed into the system and then you feel lightheaded, anxious or jittery.

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