



Seaham Harbour Counselling Services have produced this help-sheet to help you during this difficult time. You might be worried about coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it could affect your life. This may include having to stay at home and avoid other people. Self-isolating might feel difficult or stressful. There are lots of things you can try that could help you. Some of the methods refer to making plans after isolating.

This information is to help you cope if:

- you're feeling anxious or worried about coronavirus
- you're staying at home and avoiding public places, following Government advice that we should stay at home as much as possible
- you are self-isolating because you, or someone you live with, has symptoms of coronavirus. Self-isolating means that you stay home and keep away from other people.

I just thought I would pass on a few tips / techniques to try and help you manage your anxiety at this time. If these are things you are already doing or are familiar with, then please accept my apologies.

- Breathing – as anxiety generally feels like a weight on your chest, controlling your breathing is a great way of being able to bring your anxiety levels down. They don't have to be deep breaths, but the most important thing is for you to visualise your inhale as blue (calming) and your exhale as red (anxiety). If you feel your anxiety levels starting to rise, just stop and concentrate on your

breathing for a few moments and this will help to ground you again. A side effect of high anxiety also means our irritability levels are up and tempers get frayed, so hopefully this will help.

- 3 Good Things – it's easy to focus on the negativity that is surrounding us every day, so by identifying 3 things that have happened each day which made us feel good, will help us to focus on the positives in life and not so much on the negatives.
- News – try to limit your exposure to the news. Set aside some time each day to catch up with the news, otherwise you can become immersed in it and this can increase your anxiety. Try to avoid rumour and stick to trusted sources such as BBC, Sky and ITV.
- Mindfulness – if you go out for a walk, alone, with your pooch, your kids, grandkids etc, take more notice of your surroundings. Look at the colours; listen to the birds; smell the air etc. Use that time to really appreciate your surroundings and again, this will help to ground you in the here and now.

Finally, please remember that this situation is not forever, what we are experiencing now is situational stress. It's not pleasant, but it is temporary.

Three things that make you feel good.

Choose three things from this list that made you feel good. Do this every day for a week. Write about it overleaf.

One good thing that happened to me today...

Something good that I saw someone do...

Today I had fun when...

Something I accomplished today...

Something funny that happened today...

Someone I was thankful for today...

Something I was thankful for today...

Today I smiled when...

Something about today I'll always want to remember...

Today was special because...

Today I was proud of myself because...

Something interesting that happened today...

My favourite part of today...

Something I was happy about today...

Something I did well today...

Day one

Day two

Day three

Day four

Day five

Day six

Day seven

ANXIETY



Anxiety is the body's way of responding to being in danger. Adrenaline is rushed into our bloodstream to enable us to run away or fight. This happens whether the danger is real, or whether we believe the danger is there when there is none. It is the body's alarm and survival mechanism. Primitive man wouldn't have survived for long without this life-saving response. It works so well, that it often kicks in when it's not needed - when the danger is in our heads rather than in

reality. We think we're in danger, so that's enough to trigger the system to go, go, go! People who get anxious tend to get into scanning mode - where they're constantly on the lookout for danger, hyper-alert to any of the signals, and make it more likely that the alarm system will be activated.

Thoughts that often occur relate to our overestimating or exaggerating the actual threat and underestimating or minimising our ability to cope:

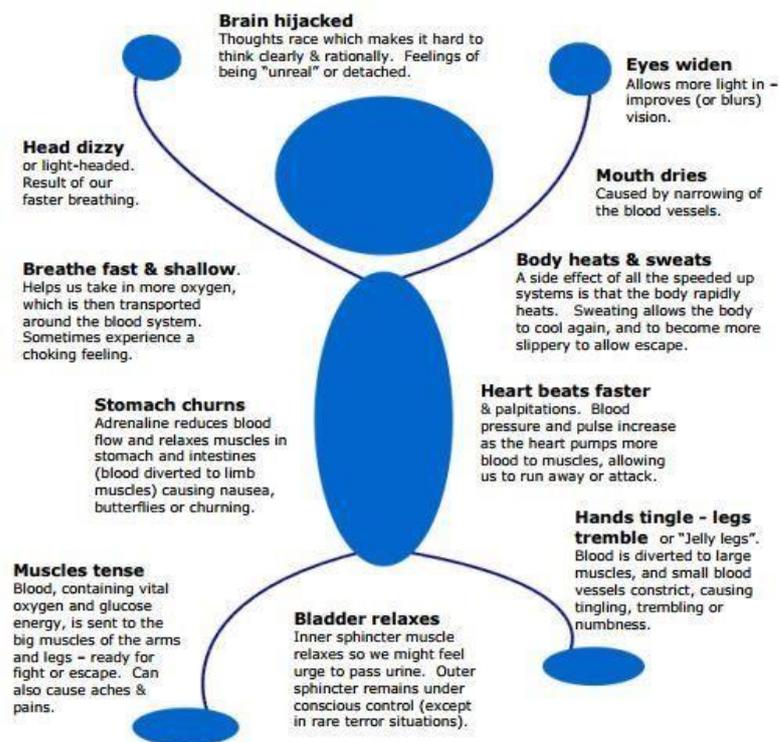
- I'm in danger right now
- The worst possible scenario is going to happen
- I won't be able to cope with it



ALARMING ADRENALINE !

The body's alarm system

When the brain perceives a threat, it activates the body's "fight or flight" alarm system, and adrenaline is released into the blood from the adrenal glands. We experience uncomfortable feelings because the adrenaline makes the body systems speed up, diverting blood towards the big muscles, preparing us to attack (anger) or escape (anxiety).



After the adrenaline has died down, we can feel exhausted, shaky and weak.

Behaviours might include:

- Avoiding people or places. Not going out
- Going to certain places at certain times, e.g. shopping at smaller shops, at less busy times. Only going with someone else
- Escape, leave early
- Go to the feared situation but use coping behaviours to get you through: examples include self-talk, holding a drink, smoking more, fiddling with clothes or handbag, avoiding eye contact with others, having an escape plan, medication. These are called 'safety behaviours'.

Safety behaviours can also help to keep your anxiety going. Whilst you depend on them to help you cope, you don't get to find out that without them, the anxiety would reduce and go away on its own.

Whilst avoiding people or situations might help you feel better at that time, it doesn't make your anxiety any better over a longer period. If you're frightened that your anxiety will make you pass out or vomit in the supermarket aisle, you won't find out that won't happen, because you don't go. So, the belief that it will happen remains, along with the anxiety.

Vicious Cycle of Anxiety

We all feel anxious sometimes. A certain amount of anxiety helps us to be more alert and focused. For example, just prior to an exam, a few exam nerves have a positive effect - motivating us, helping us focus our thoughts on the job in hand, making us more alert. Too much anxiety, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy and detrimental to our lives and relationships.

Vicious Cogs of Anxiety

By looking at the "cogs" that keep the central problem going, we can target and make positive changes in each of the cogs, which will at least, slow down, and at best, stop, the central problem, for example:



Print a blank Cogs PDF (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/Cogs.pdf) and fill in the factors that keep your anxiety going

Identify your triggers

What or when are the times when you are more likely to get anxious? If you can see the patterns, then maybe you can do something about those situations, and do something different.



- Certain places?
- Certain people?
- Anytime, anyplace?
- See certain things?
- Hear certain things?
- Think ahead to certain situation?

Doing things differently



If avoiding situations and using safety behaviours helps to maintain our anxiety over the long-term, then it makes sense that learning to confront it might be uncomfortable in the short-term but will help us take control and helps us feel better over time.

Plan to gradually do the things you normally avoid. For instance, if you normally avoid going out to big social events at work, then start with a small dinner at a restaurant where you feel more comfortable, with few close colleagues - not the annual Christmas party! Whilst it will feel uncomfortable, you will learn that you can enjoy these events, and that the anxious feeling does go away.

If you have a fear of types of places (e.g. lifts), then you could start by listing different places (smaller, bigger lifts, taller, smaller buildings, glass walls or enclosed etc). You could start by standing next to a lift for a couple of minutes each day for a couple of weeks, then slowly build up to standing in the doorway with the doors open, then to getting in the lift without the doors closing, then to letting the doors close before opening them again, then to going up one floor etc. You can use breathing techniques or self-talk (challenging your unhelpful thoughts and repeating more realistic thoughts) to get you through these times.

If you normally depend on 'safety behaviours' to help you cope, then list them in order of importance, then start by dropping or not doing the least important, and gradually work your way up over time.

What to do when you feel anxious

- **STOPP!** Pause, take a breath, don't react automatically (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm) □ Ask yourself:
 - What am I reacting to?
 - What is it that I think is going to happen here?
 - What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
 - Am I getting things out of proportion?
 - How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months' time?
 - Am I overestimating the danger?
 - Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
 - Am I mind-reading what others might be thinking?
 - Am I believing I can predict the future?
 - Is there another way of looking at this? Is this fact or opinion?
 - What advice would I give someone else in this situation?
 - Am I putting more pressure on myself?
 - Just because I **feel** bad, doesn't mean things really **are** bad.



- What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?
- What would be the consequences of responding the way I usually do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for others)
- Visualise yourself coping in the situation you feel anxious about. See the situation to a successful completion.

How to deal with the physical sensations of anxiety

Counteract the body's adrenaline response - it's readiness for action, by using that energy healthily.

- Practice calming or mindful breathing - this one act alone will help reduce the physical sensations, emotions and intensity of thoughts.
(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)
- Visualisation: Breathe in blue (for calm), breathe out red
- Exercise - Go for a walk, run or cycle, or do some gardening or housework.



DEPRESSION

Depression can happen to anyone - and does happen to one in four of us over our lifetimes. Different factors that make it more likely to happen include biological make-up, upbringing, or reaction to life events. What keeps it going though, is how we deal with those things. The way we think and what we do affects the way we feel. Depression is often accompanied by other feelings such as guilt, shame, anger and anxiety.

Thoughts

People who are depressed tend to think very negatively about themselves, the future and the world around them. It can be like seeing life through “gloomy specs”.

- Everything is hopeless - nothing can change
- I'm useless, worthless
- It's all my fault
- The world is a terrible place - everything goes wrong



We can dwell on these thoughts repeatedly, mulling over things, asking ourselves why, thinking regretful things about the past, what we should or shouldn't have done.



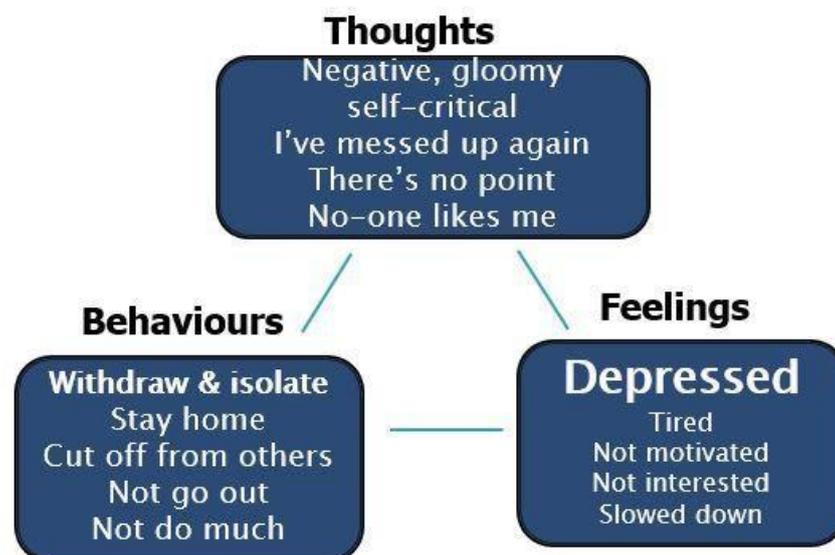
Physical Sensations

- Tiredness, fatigue, lethargy
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Sleep changes (sleep more or less)
- Eating changes (eat more or less)
- Lose interest in hobbies, activities, sex

Behaviours

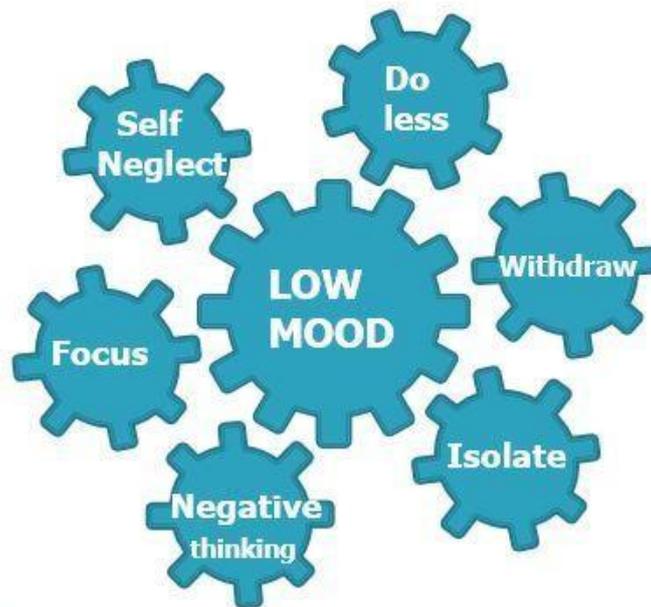
Because of the tiredness, difficulty sleeping and eating, and negative style of thinking, we tend to do less and less. We stop doing the things we used to do and enjoy. It could get so bad that we can't even go to work or do things at home. We want to stay in bed or stay at home doing very little. We might isolate ourselves from friends and family.

Vicious Cycle of Depression



Vicious Cogs of Depression

By looking at the "cogs" that keep the central problem going, we can target and make positive changes in each of the cogs, which will at least, slow down, and at best, stop, the central problem, for example:



Print a blank Cogs PDF (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/Cogs.pdf) and fill in the factors that keep your depression going.

Breaking the cycle:

Activity & Physical Exercise

When we're feeling depressed, we tend to do less and less because of the tiredness, difficulty sleeping and eating, and negative style of thinking. We stop doing the things we used to do and enjoy. It could get so bad that we can't even go to work or do things at home. We want to stay in bed, or stay at home doing very little, and we might isolate ourselves from friends and family.



Just increasing our activity and exercise levels can make an enormous impact on our mood by: Making us feel better about ourselves

- Making us feel less tired
- Motivating us to do more
- Improving our ability to think more clearly
- Helping us think about something other than focussing on our unhelpful thoughts
- Using up the adrenaline resources created by anxiety and anger Increasing motivation

- Giving us a sense of achievement
- Enjoyment
- Being with other people
- Stimulating the body to produce natural anti-depressants
- Making us generally more healthy
- Stimulating our appetite

Healthy Balance - Schedule activities each day which give you a sense of:

Achievement

Closeness to others

Enjoyment



- Use an **Activity Diary** www.get.gg/docs/ActivityDiary.pdf
- or the **ACE Log** www.get.gg/docs/ACELog.pdf
- It's important to get a healthy balance of activities which give you a sense of achievement, enjoyment and being close to others. Choose activities which are important to you, have positive meanings, or are purposeful, and you might want to plan rest periods too.
- Keep your goals realistic – set achievable limits. For example: aim to walk for 15 minutes rather than a half-marathon or wash the dishes rather than spring clean the whole house.
Don't set yourself up to fail! You can build up your activity over time.

Doing things differently

If lack of activity and tiredness is helping to maintain our negative thinking, and therefore keeping us depressed, then doing more (despite feeling tired and depressed) will help us feel better.



- Do something different (to what you normally do)
- Pause, take a breath
- Mindfulness - learn Mindful Breathing
- Focus your attention fully on another activity - Mindful activity
- Relaxation techniques - try lots and find one that works for you
- Put on some music - sing and dance along, or just listen attentively (use music that is likely to help you feel your desired emotion - avoid sad songs if you're depressed) Meditation or Prayer
- Help others
- Be with others - contact a friend, visit family
- Talk to someone
- Grounding techniques - look around you, what do you see, hear, smell, sense? Hold a comforting object.
- Physical exercise - walk, swim, go to the gym, cycle
- If you're struggling with motivation.... use the 5-minute rule. Commit to do the activity for just 5 minutes. After 5 minutes, you can choose to stop or continue (and you might find that you want to continue)
- Engage in a hobby or other interest - if you don't have one, find one! What have you enjoyed in the past? What have you sometimes thought about doing but not got around to?
- Write down your thoughts and feelings - get them out of your head
- Just take one step at a time - don't plan too far ahead
- Pamper yourself - do something you really enjoy, or do something relaxing
- Positive self-talk - encourage yourself, tell yourself: I can do this, I am strong and capable - find an affirmation that works for you (even if you don't believe it at first!). Write it down and memorise it for when you need it. See Affirmations
- Do something creative - make a box of items that remind you to use the techniques that help, or put photos on paper, or write and decorate a list
- Use Safe Place Imagery



- Tell yourself: "This will pass, it's only temporary". "I've got through this before, I can do it now". When we're going through a tunnel and become fearful of being trapped, there's no point in stopping - we just must carry on in order to reach the end of the tunnel. That light is there and waiting!
- Visualise yourself doing the things you used to enjoy doing, or would like to enjoy doing, and successfully doing what you need to do.

Thinking differently

- **STOPP!** Pause, take a breath □ Ask yourself:
- What am I reacting to? What have I been thinking about here?
- Is this fact or opinion?
- Am I getting things out of proportion?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months' time?
- Am I expecting something from this person or situation that is unrealistic?
- What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
- Am I using that negative filter? Those gloomy specs? Is there another way of looking?



at it?

- What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
- Am I jumping to conclusions about what this person meant? Am I misreading between the lines? Is it possible that they didn't mean that?
- What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?

- Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others, and putting myself down? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?
- Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?
- This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.
- What would be the consequences of doing what I normally do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for the other person)
- Visualisation: Breathe in **orange** (for positive energy) and breathe out **blue/black**.



Relaxation



Relaxation is allowing physical and/or mental tension to be released. Tension is the body's natural response to threat, part of the body's alarm or survival mechanism. It can be a very useful response, but a lot of the time, we don't need this tension, so it's okay to learn to let it go, and learn some relaxation skills.

Healthy living is a matter of balance. Relaxation is part of the balancing process alongside other aspects of your lifestyle such as what you eat, your physical activity and how you handle stress. Learning to relax takes practice, as with learning any new skill.

It's a great help to learn a relaxation technique, to help us unwind and bring our tensions and anxiety under control. There are several books, leaflets or recordings which we can use ourselves. It's a good idea to practise regularly so we can be more prepared for the more stressful times.

How relaxation helps

- *Reduces tiredness* – if you can manage everyday life without excessive tension
- *Improves performance* – your performance in work, sport or music can be raised through self-awareness and control of tension
- *Reduces pain* – pain can occur as a result of tension e.g. headaches and backache. Relaxation can help you to cope by raising your pain threshold and reducing the amount of pain
- *Coping with stress* – relaxation helps you to reduce the effects of stress and to breathe effectively
- *Improves sleep* – by allowing you to be calm and peaceful
- *Improves self-confidence* – by increasing your self-awareness and ability to cope with daily life
- *Improves personal relationships* – it is easier to relate well to other people when you are relaxed and self-confident



Relaxation and stress

When we feel anxious or stressed, it's our body's natural response to feeling threatened, the alarm system which helps us deal with danger: our breathing rate increases, as does our blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, sweating, state of mental arousal and adrenaline flow. A lot of the time, we don't need those survival responses, so relaxation helps to decrease that adrenaline response, to let it go.

Breathing and Relaxation



Our out-breath releases tension in the chest muscles and allows all muscles to release their tension more easily. Breathing is far more effective when we use our diaphragms, rather than with the chest muscles. Sit comfortably in a chair and place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen (hand on navel). Take two or three large breaths – which hand moves first, and which moves most?

Practise so that it is the lower hand on your abdomen that moves rather than the one on your chest. People often think that their tummy goes in when they breathe in - but the reverse should be the case.

When you're feeling tense or hoping to relax, try breathing out a little bit more slowly and more deeply, noticing a short pause before the in-breath takes over (don't exaggerate the in-breath, just let it happen). You might find it useful to count slowly or prolong a word such as "one" or "peace" to help elongate the out-breathe a little (to yourself or out loud).

There are various ways in which to achieve relaxation, most use breath control in some way. Whichever method you choose, regular practice will help. Some examples are:

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation – tense/relax muscular relaxation

- Meditation (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/meditation.htm)
- Mindfulness (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)
- Guided Imagery or Visualisation (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/imagery.htm)
- Autogenic Training – mental exercises to link body and mind to bring about relaxation
- Alexander Technique – teaches the importance of posture, which improves mental and physical wellbeing.
- Bio Feedback – self-regulation of bodily functions, e.g. Slowing heart rate
- Massage
- Aromatherapy
- Physical Activity
- Tai Chi
- Yoga
- Music (music is very personal, so use whatever helps you relax) either used alone, or with any of the above methods (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/music.htm)

Simple Breathing Exercise

We'll start with a simple breathing exercise which can be done in a few seconds, no matter where you are. It is particularly helpful at stressful times, but it's also useful to do it at regular intervals throughout the day.



Take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for 5 seconds. Feel your abdomen expand as you do this.

Breathe out slowly, to a count of 5. Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling ALL the air in your lungs. If you're alone, you could make a noise like "who" as you do this to help you feel the air being let out. Keep the outbreath going for as long as you can. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

Quickie Relaxation

Wherever you are (e.g. in the car, supermarket, awaiting appointment etc)

- **STOP**
- **SHOULDERS DOWN**
- **TAKE 2 OR 3 SLIGHTLY SLOWER, SLIGHTLY DEEPER OUT-BREATHS**
(just let the in-breath happen)
- **CARRY ON WITH WHATEVER YOU WERE DOING, BUT JUST A LITTLE SLOWER**

Colour Breathing

For a fast and effective calming technique in a stressful situation, visualise the colour blue. Visualise breathing in that blue calm and breathing out red tension.

Before any other relaxation exercise

Before any relaxation exercise, go to the toilet if you need to, and wear loose comfortable clothing. Lie or sit somewhere with the whole of your body supported.

Make yourself totally comfortable. Close your eyes.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Sit in a comfortable chair (or lie on the floor, or on a bed). Ensure you will not be disturbed by other noises. If you become aware of sounds - just try to ignore them and let them leave your mind just as soon as they enter. Make sure the whole of your body is comfortably supported - including your arms, head and feet. (Rest your arms on the arms of the chair, with your feet flat on the floor - if sitting!)

- *Close your eyes. Feel the chair supporting your whole body - your legs, your arms, your head. If you can feel any tension, begin to let it go. Take 2 slow and deep breaths, and let the tension begin to flow out.*
- *Become aware of your head - notice how your forehead feels. Let any tension go and feel your forehead become smooth and wide. Let any tension go from around your eyes, your mouth, your cheeks and your jaw. Let your teeth part slightly and feel the tension go.*
- *Now focus on your neck - let the chair take the weight of your head and feel your neck relax. Now your head is feeling heavy and floppy. Let your shoulders lower gently down. Your shoulders are wider, your neck is longer.*
- *Notice how your body feels as you begin to relax.*
- *Be aware of your arms and your hands. Let them sink down into the chair. Now they are feeling heavy and limp.*
- *Think about your back - from your neck to your hips. Let the tension go and feel yourself sinking down into the chair. Let your hips, your legs and your feet relax and roll outwards. Notice the feeling of relaxation taking over.*
- *Notice your breathing - your abdomen gently rising and falling as you breathe. Let your next breath be a little deeper, a little slower...*
- *Now, you are feeling completely relaxed and heavy. Lie still and concentrate on slow, rhythmic breathing....*
- *When you want to, count back from 5 to 1 and open your eyes. Wiggle your fingers and toes, breathe deeply and stretch. Look around the*

*room, becoming more alert as you notice what you see, hear and feel.
Pause before gently rising.*



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Notice: **NOW** Where my attention is.

Observe: What I'm doing. Say to myself: "I am walking", "I am sitting",
"I am breathing", then notice those sensations in your body.



Wise Mind: What now? How shall I continue? Doing or Being?



If you want an explanation for your present, look at your past.

If you want to know your future, look at your present.

Buddha.

Mindfulness for Busy People

- Choose an activity to do mindfully throughout the day, for one, two or five minutes. For example: Drink a cup of tea. Walk. Wash the dishes.
 - Whatever you are doing, be in that moment, right now. See, hear, smell, touch, feel, breathe.
 - Simply notice whenever other thoughts and sensations come to mind, then refocus on your chosen mindful activity.
 - Be patient and compassionate with yourself.
 - Describe... rather than judge good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.
-
- It is as it is.
 - It will pass.

Everything Flows. Nothing is fixed. Heraclitus

5	things I can see
4	things I can hear
3	things I can touch or feel
2	things I can smell or like the smell of
1	slow deep breath

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Additional useful help can be found at:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-coronavirus-4799661>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>