

Foundations of Health – Stress

Stress Reduction / Relaxation

For most people, dedicating time each day to engage in a relaxation or mindfulness technique can have many positive health benefits. However, not everyone relaxes well with mindfulness or meditation, for some, feeling physically grounded in exercise, breathing techniques or even cold water therapy may be a better option. Finding what works best for you is important and we acknowledge that everyone is different.

Finding an activity which you enjoy, to help down-regulate the stress response, is great for reducing high cortisol levels and inflammation, improving sleep, regulating hormones and helping with weight loss.

We have collected together a number of alternative strategies you may wish to consider to lower stress and its effects. Feel free to experiment with different techniques and discuss the options with your Functional Medicine Doctor, Nutritional Therapist or Health Coach.

Guided Meditation

Many forms of meditation have been shown to be beneficial for health. Forms include resting the mind on the senses, on a phrase such as a positive affirmation or a mantra or on the breathing. For many, guided meditations are an accessible way to start a meditation practice and there are thousands of resources to help those wishing to access the benefits of meditation.

Meditation Apps:

Attached to your phone? Put it to good use supporting you in your meditation and relaxation efforts. Those with consistently good patient feedback include:

Calm: Soothing music, sleep stories and guided meditations all in one place – requires subscription: <https://www.calm.com>

Insight Timer: A beautiful collection of meditations all for free
<https://insighttimer.com/meditation-app>

Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com>

Smiling Mind: <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>

Self-Compassion Meditations:

Self-compassion meditation is a way to help reduce self-criticism, work through painful emotions and nurtures a feeling of loving-kindness towards ourselves and others. There are many teachers of this technique who offer guided meditations for all to enjoy and we have selected a few for you to try:

Dr Kristin Neff: <https://self-compassion.org>

Dr Christopher Germer: <https://chrisgermer.com/meditations/>

Biofeedback Training:

If you like to see results from your practice and engage with new technology, you might enjoy adding in a biofeedback sensor to show you how your practice is going and help teach mindfulness and relaxation in the midst of the everyday hustle of life.

Heartmath: The Heartmath sensor allows you to see your Heart Rate Variability (HRV) – which is a reflection of your inner balance and emotional state:

<https://www.heartmath.com>

Vagal Nerve Stimulation

The Vagus nerve controls our Parasympathetic nervous system. We can activate this by many means – by breathing exercises, singing, gargling with cold water and many other forms of relaxation therapy.

However, in recent years, several electronic techniques to directly stimulate the nerve have been developed and some of our patients have found this to be useful in addition to their other lifestyle changes for reducing stress levels.

Sensate: <https://www.getsensate.com/pages/meet-sensate>

Neurosym: <https://nurosym.com/pages/story>

Physical Meditations and Yoga:

Yoga is designed to be a moving meditation. For devotees of this practice, you may enjoy some of the beautiful short meditations available from Adrienne:

<https://yogawithadriene.com/classroom- meditation-for-all-ages/>

Psychotherapeutic support

Everyone needs a place to feel validated and understood. For some this means talking to family, or friends. For others professional support is required. The clinic is a safe place for you to talk about your experiences and feelings. However, we are happy to work with you to find other forms of mental and emotional support.

The Journey: Our Functional Medicine Health Coach and psychotherapist Karen is skilled in this approach which uses guided introspection to enable clients to strip away layers of emotions that have been stored in their bodies over the years, causing both emotional and physical blocks. Sessions last up to 3 hours for adults and 90 minutes for children.

This globally recognized and critically acclaimed healing and transformational process, pioneered by Brandon Bays, has released hundreds of thousands of people world-wide from blocked emotions and trapped cell memories, releasing conditions as varied as anxiety, depression, physical illness, trauma, low self-esteem, phobias, unwanted behaviours, pain, relationship difficulties and career limitations, allowing them to live more freely and to their potential.

If you would like to discuss this therapy further with Karen, then please book a discovery appointment through the clinic.

Breathing Techniques

If guided meditations or using thought to slow heart rate and breathing are not for you, then you may find benefit from addressing high cortisol and stress via regulation of the breath. Used as a yoga technique for thousands of years, breath alteration or control should only be undertaken with trained guidance (phone apps are fine).

Buteyko Breathing: Buteyko can help improve peripheral oxygenation and reduce stress and cortisol levels by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. It lowers the heart rate and stress response by lowering the breathing rate.

Our qualified Buteyko coach Laura offers online Buteyko technique lessons to patients as an initial three-session training programme (plus top-up sessions as required). Please do contact the clinic to book an appointment or enquire further.

Relaxing Breathing is available through many Apps and a selection are reviewed here: <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/best-meditation-apps/>

An excellent summary of widely used breathing techniques is given by **Dr Rangan Chatterjee** in his blog (with some great video content) here: <https://drchatterjee.com/5-breathing-techniques-help-reduce-stress/>

Trial of the Wim Hof Technique: The Wim Hof Method is a simple, yet powerful method, based on the foundation of three pillars; Breathing, Cold Therapy and Commitment. Online courses or retreats with wild swimming and ice baths are all available online to those brave enough to wake the ice warrior within. You can read more about this here:

<https://www.wimhofmethod.com>

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT):

EFT, also known as Tapping is a holistic healing technique based on the combined principles of ancient Chinese acupuncture and modern psychology. The basic Tapping technique requires you to focus on a thought or emotion while using your fingertips to tap on specific meridian points of the body. This process, sends a calming signal to the brain, allowing you to feel relaxed and in control. Resources include:

The Tapping solution from Nick Ortner: <https://www.thetappingsolution.com>

The Tapping Q&A : <https://tappingqanda.com/>

Go EFT Tapping–Reduce Stress: <https://completehomespa.com/eft-app/>

Brain Retraining Techniques:

These courses have been found by many patients to be great and accessible resources with a holistic approach to stress management. Take a look at the websites or discuss with your doctor or Therapist which of the courses might be most appropriate for your situation.

Dynamic Neural Retraining System (DNRS): A self-directed learning programme designed to regulate maladaptive stress responses. We also use it to help patients suffering with Mast Cell Activation syndrome and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity.

<https://retrainingthebrain.com>

Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) Rewire: Aimed specifically at patients with chronic fatigue, POTS and MCS, and is especially beneficial where there is a combination of fatigue and anxiety. You can read more about this here: <https://ansrewire.com>

Curable: This is an app which uses multiple cognitive techniques and exercises to help people suffering from chronic pain. We have seen success in patients with migraine and fibromyalgia when combined with our holistic approach. <https://www.curablehealth.com>

The Gupta Programme: A brain retraining programme designed to help those with Chronic health conditions which has been successfully used to help patients with CFS / ME, long covid, Anxiety, MCAS POTS and chronic pain. <https://www.guptaprogram.com>

Laughter / Smiling:

There is strong evidence that laughter and smiling can help to improve both mental and physical health by:

Stimulating endorphin release, helping to reduce pain and increase the feeling of wellbeing.

Increasing positivity – smiling during brief a stressor, can help the release chemicals in the brain that reduce stress levels.

Decreases risk of heart disease by stimulating circulation and supporting blood vessel relaxation, which helps to lowers blood pressure.

Causing the release neuropeptides that help to maintain immune tolerance and fight infection.

There's a lovely article on this here: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm> Life can be hectic and overwhelming, so try to include humour in your daily routine and remember to smile.

My Notes: