

MINDFULNESS TIP SHEET #1

MINDFUL BREATHING

Effectively managing stress is about taking control of your thoughts and emotions to counter our innate “fight, flight or freeze” response. Resilient individuals are effective at managing their reactions and adjusting their physiological state when they are experiencing a difficult or stressful situation



A simple and effective way of doing this is to take control of your **breathing**.

Whilst it may sound simplistic, conscious and controlled breathing is the only scientifically proven way to take control of your automatic stress response.



FACT

When we are stressed, adrenaline and cortisol is released. This results in our breathing rate increasing and becoming more rapid and shallow. This means that we are not taking in as much oxygen and expelling the amount of carbon dioxide as we normally do which results in us feeling uptight and anxious. One of the best ways of moderating this stress response is to take control of our breathing. Slower, deeper breathing reduces the release of adrenalin and cortisol and triggers your body to release endorphins, dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin – the neurotransmitter quartet responsible for when we feel positive, calm and happy!

So...by changing how we breathe we can subsequently change our body's response to stress, how stress effects our body, and then how we think, feel and behave in response to difficulties!

NOW, LET'S PRACTICE IT!

Here is a simple and effective controlled breathing technique that you can use anytime, anywhere to manage your stress response.

5x5x5

It's called the 5X5X5 Breathing Technique. It is a deep and controlled breathing technique where you **slowly, rhythmically** and **methodically** count your breathing as you **inhale for a count of 5, hold for a count of 5, and then exhale for a count of 5, and you do that 5 times.** That's it!

Here's how you do it...

- **First**, make sure you are in a comfortable position, your spine reasonably straight. You can keep your eyes open or if you feel comfortable to, go ahead and close them.
- Bring your attention to your breathing.
- Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the outbreath.
- Then, start by breathing in for a slow count of 5
- And hold for a slow count of 5
- Then exhale for a count of 5
- **Inhale for 5..... hold for 5..... exhale for 5.....**
- Thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.
- You can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- **Inhale for 5.... hold for 5.... Exhale for 5.....**
- You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don't judge yourself for having them, or analyse them in any way.
- It's okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.
- Keep at the 5X5X5 method, until you are ready to return back to your normal breathing
- Slowly, **Inhale for 5..... hold for 5..... exhale for 5.....**
- Start to bring your attention back to your surroundings, and open your eyes (if they were closed)

Following this exercise...

You probably feel a little different, maybe a little sleepy or maybe calmer and clearer. This is because just by deep breathing for a couple of minutes – you have increased that quartet of neurochemicals into your system and they are doing their job in helping you feel relaxed!

ONLY HAVE A MINUTE?

If you feel that you don't have enough time to sit for more than a minute and do the 5X5X5 technique, or if the 5X5X5 exercise seem too difficult try the **One Minute Mindfulness Exercise**.

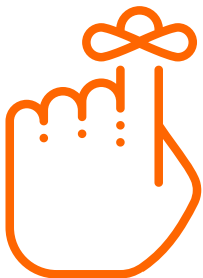
- Your challenge is to set a timer for 1 minute.
- For that minute your only task is to focus all your attention on your breathing.
- Just for one minute, although it may seem like an eternity.
- Be ready to catch your mind from wandering off...because it will... then gently return your attention to your breath whenever it does.
- Think about slowing down your breath, breathing deeply.... Holding.... Then breathing out.....
- When the timer is up, slowly return back to your normal breathing and bring your attention back to your surroundings.



Unless you are already skilled in the practice of mindfulness, it probably went something like this: "I focused on my breathing for about 5 seconds and then I thought about something else!"

Don't feel disillusioned, it takes a lot of practice so keep it up through daily practice and gradually lengthen your period of mindfulness.

REMEMBER...



Using controlled and conscious breathing is a habit of resilient individuals. You can do this anytime you are feeling stressed and uptight to get the immediate short-term benefit of feeling calm and more in control during stressful situations, and then also reducing the long term health and wellbeing impact that stress can have on you!

If you or someone you know needs help contact **TIACS** on 0488 846 988 or your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your GP or call: **LifeLine** on 13 11 14, **Kids Helpline** on 1800 551 800, **MensLine Australia** on 1300 789 978 or the **Suicide Call Back Service** on 1300 659 467.