

Managing Stress to Balance Emotional Energy

Finger holds exercises are a simple tool for self-care, and help emphasize that we carry the tools for self-care within ourselves. This is something we can do at any time, when we feel stress or strong emotions. We invite you to take this time to let go of the burdens of the day and find your center to help you feel grounded.



Finger Holds Exercise

You may do the finger holds with either hand. Breathe deeply as you gently hold each finger and listen to the meditation. Hold each finger for about one minute. You may feel a pulsing as the energy is released and flows freely.

The thumb connects with tears, grief and emotional pain. Hold the thumb of one hand with the other hand. Breathe in deeply and, as you exhale, ask to let go of all the grief and sorrow you feel. Breathe in and ask to be filled with peace and comfort. (Pause)

The index finger connects with fear. Hold your index finger. Breathe in deeply and, as you exhale, ask to let go of all fear, all that makes you afraid. Breathe in and ask to be filled with courage and strength of being. (Pause)

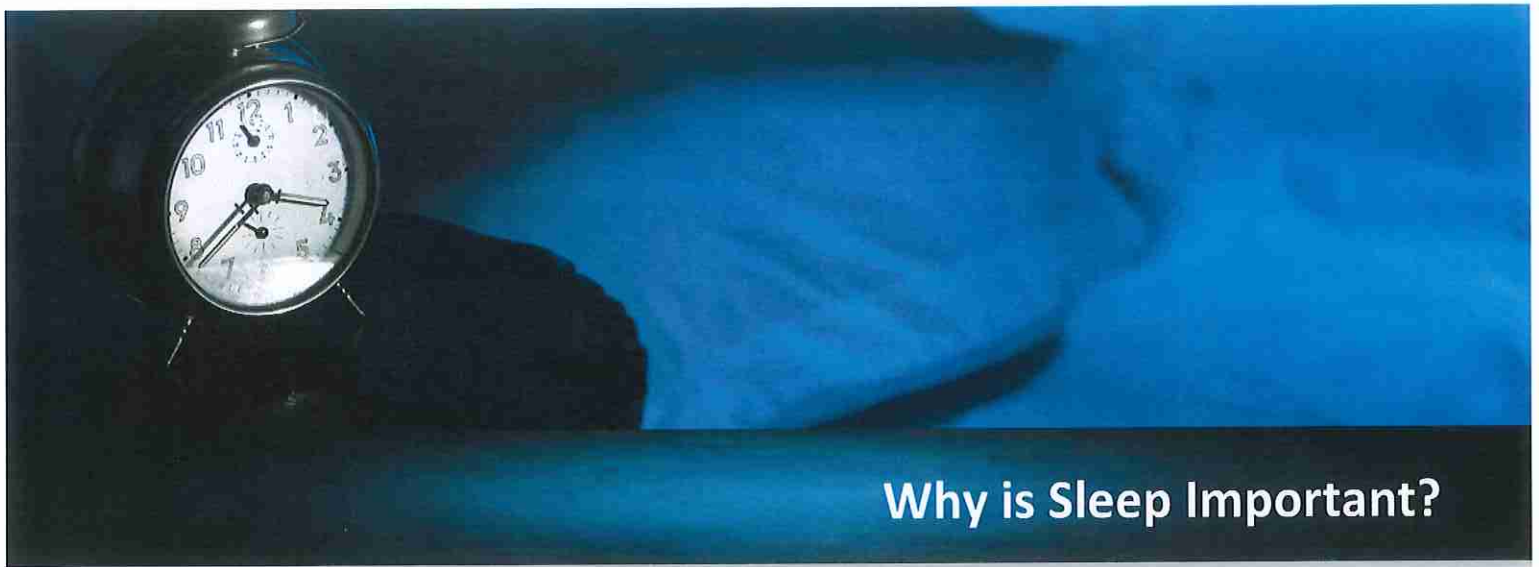
The middle finger connects with anger and rage. Hold your middle finger. Breathe in deeply and, as you exhale, ask to let go of all anger and rage. Breathe in and ask to be filled with compassion, energy and creative passion. (Pause)

The ring finger connects with anxiety and nervousness. Hold your ring finger. Breathe in deeply and, as you exhale, ask to let go of all worry and anxiety. Breathe in and ask to be filled with a deep sense of peace and security in the midst of life's problems, feeling held and cared for in spirit. (Pause)

The little finger connects with self-esteem. Hold your little finger. Breathe in deeply and, as you exhale, ask to let go of all insecurity and feelings of being unworthy or being a victim. Breathe in and ask to be filled with power and appreciation for yourself and a feeling of worth. (Pause)

Relax for a moment, feeling a sense of peace and tranquility as you rest in the presence of the Divine. When you are ready, gently return to the present moment.

Courtesy of Ascension Wisconsin



Why is Sleep Important?

Sleep recharges your mind and body and is important to overall health and well-being. **Healthy Sleep Hygiene** refers to **habits** that promote a good night's sleep. Not sleeping for more than 24 hours can affect your functioning as much as alcohol intoxication. Inadequate sleep can also impact:

- Concentration
- Ability to learn and retain new information
- Energy level
- Mood & coping
- Stress management
- Your body's ability to fight off illness

****Good sleep habits are effective, cost nothing, and have no side effects****

Healthy Sleep Hygiene:

- Maintain a regular sleep routine: Try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning – including weekends.
- Get exposure to natural light during the day. This can improve sleep by regulating melatonin levels and your body's internal clock.
- Limit light exposure in the evenings.
- Get enough sleep every night to be fully alert during the day. "Enough sleep" varies for everyone. You are getting "enough" sleep when you wake up feeling refreshed.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and comfortably cool.
- Select a mattress and pillow that provide support and comfort.
- Create a relaxing atmosphere in the bedroom. Turn any clocks away from view to avoid "clock-watching". Do not read, eat, or watch TV while lying in bed. If you have a pet that regularly wakes you at night, consider restricting it from your bedroom.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, visual imagery, and progressive muscle tension-relaxation before sleep.
- If you have trouble falling asleep (more than 20 minutes), keep the lights low, get up and engage in a quiet activity such as reading or listening to relaxing music. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.
- Limit caffeine from coffee, sodas, energy drinks, and chocolate after 12 noon.
- Avoid napping if possible, or limit naps to no more than 15-20 min – before 3PM.
- Avoid alcohol within five hours of bedtime – and limit your consumption to two or less drinks per day. Alcohol can cause disrupted sleep.
- Avoid drinking too much water or other fluids before bedtime to reduce night-time bladder pressure.
- Stop smoking. In addition to many negative health risks, nicotine is a stimulant.
- Exercise regularly (at least 2-3 hours before bedtime).
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Take a hot bath and do easy stretching or yoga before bedtime.
- Don't dwell on, or bring your worries to bed. If your mind is focused on work or problems at bedtime, write down your concerns on a sheet of paper and promise yourself you will deal with it tomorrow.
- Develop a routine of reading for pleasure, meditating, or having "quiet time" before bedtime, but avoid reading or watching TV in bed. Keep computers, tablets and cell phones out of the bedroom as these items are associated with wakefulness.
- Do not sleep with the TV or radio on. Background "white noise" like a fan is okay.

Courtesy of Ascension Wisconsin



Accessing Inner Wisdom: Keeping a Journal

Journaling is a way to connect more deeply with one's thoughts and feelings. Write down the events of your day to review the impact they have and to access inner wisdom.

There is no right or wrong way to keep a journal. It does help to create some personal space to do so.

Some prefer to write in a stream of consciousness, simply putting pen to paper and writing whatever thoughts or feelings come to mind. Writing whatever first comes to mind or heart can be a way to open yourself up for examining deeper questions or concerns.

Reviewing your entries every few days may reveal patterns or themes. These can lead to more intentional shifts in your perspective to choose words and actions you use each day.

Remember to breathe deeply. Deep breathing helps to center yourself and reconnect body, mind, and spirit.

Questions for reflection might include:

- What is my energy level right now?
- When did I feel most alive today?
- What circumstances are beyond my control and how did I react to them today?
- How does my attitude affect how the day is unfolding for me?
- What can I do to take care of myself today?
- What am I most proud of today?
- How do I feel in the morning and the afternoon?
- What am I most grateful for today?

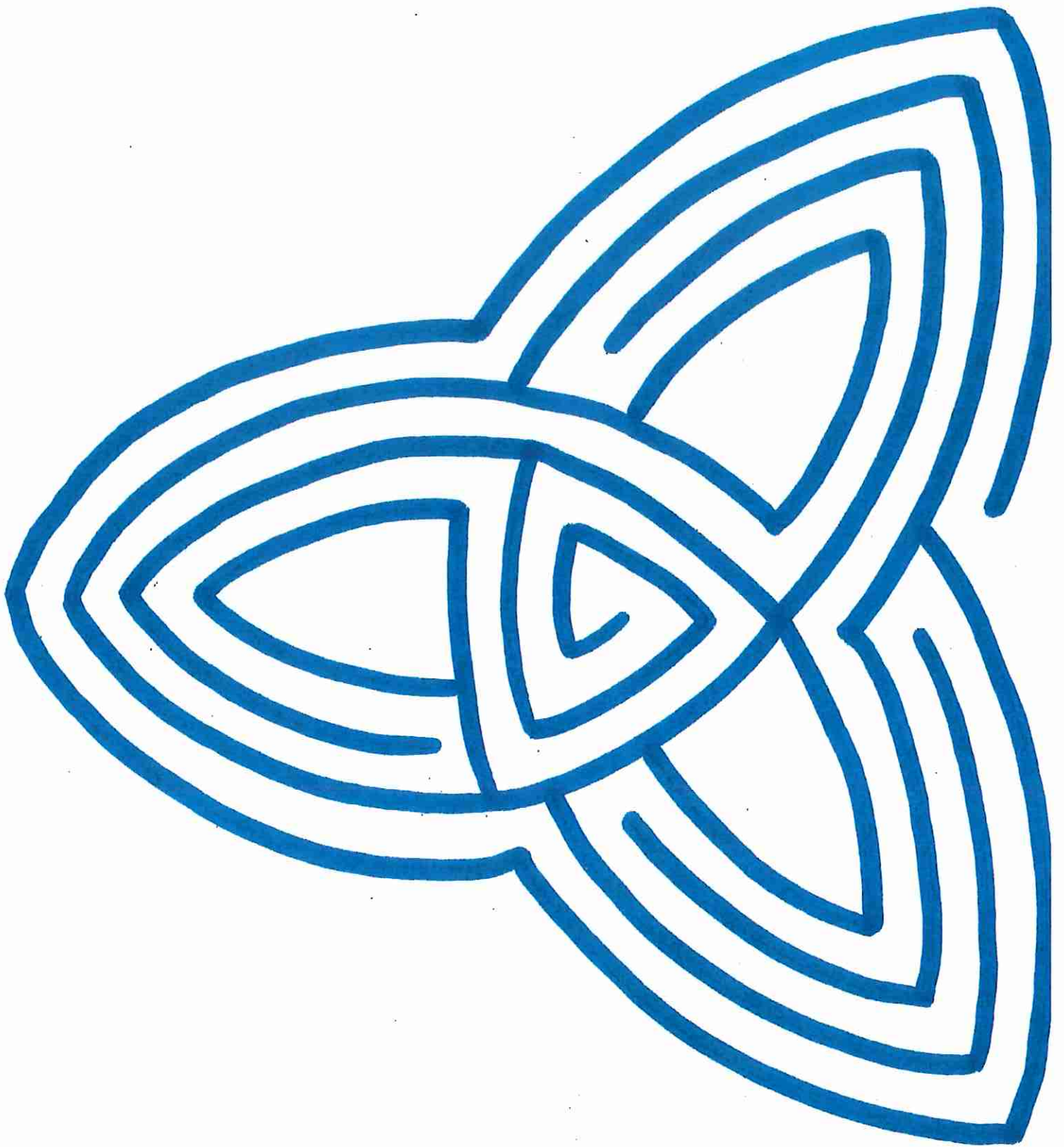
Journaling is good for your spirit:

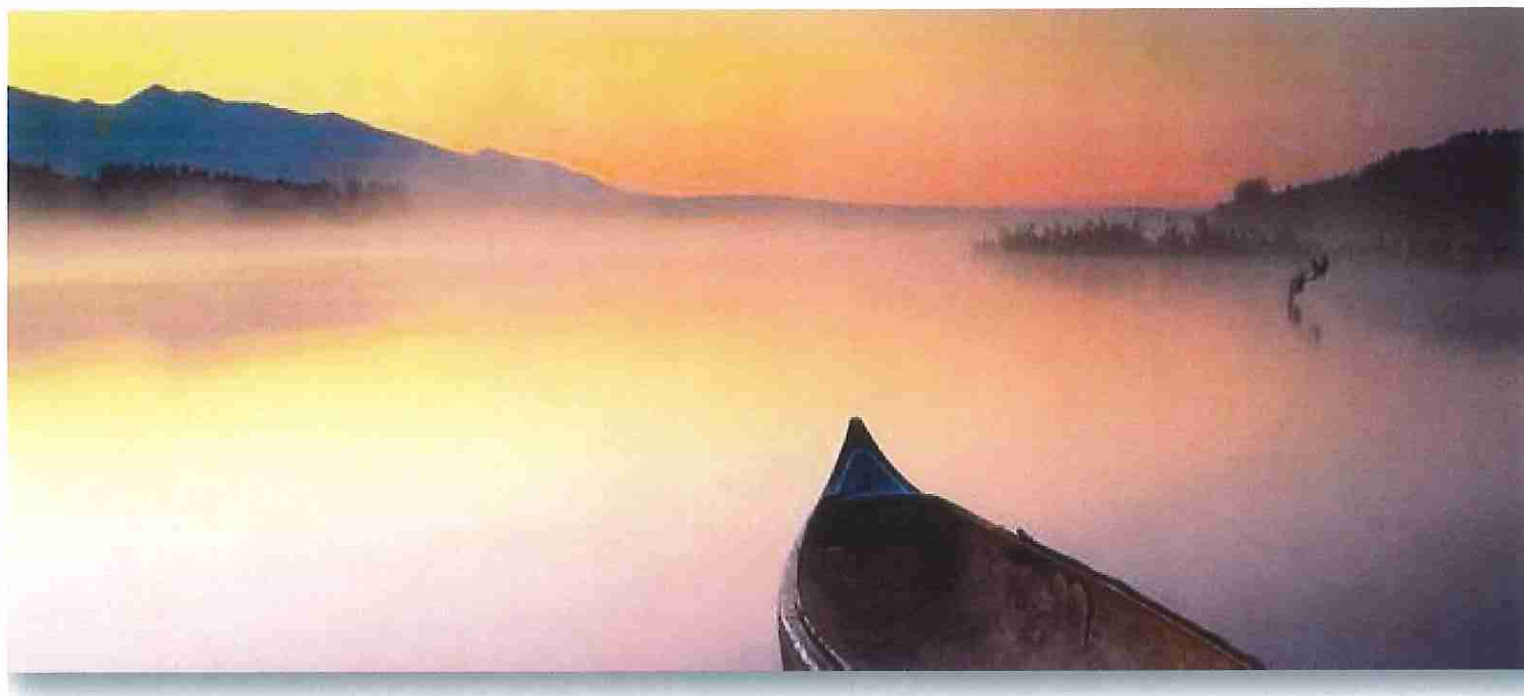
- Helps integrate both hemispheres of the brain
- Provides a safe place to process traumatic events
- Explores conscious & unconscious thoughts
- Improves self-knowledge
- Opens self to grow & identify needed changes
- Clarifies relationships
- Begins emotional healing
- Explores possibilities
- Illuminates patterns of behavior
- Identifies themes and aids in problem solving
- Clarifies thoughts & feelings

Journaling is good for your body and mind:

- Helps you relax
- Improves physical & mental health
- Shown in research to decrease symptoms of asthma and arthritis
- Improves cognitive functioning
- Strengthens the immune system
- Decreases symptoms of stress

Remember to breathe deeply. Breathing helps to center ourselves and reconnect body, mind, and spirit.





Managing Energy and Maintaining Calm Effectiveness

(from www.robertkcooper.com)

Start the day right: In the first few moments after awakening, imagine yourself at your best. Think of a specific time when you felt productive and successful. Trust that you will be successful today. Anchor this thought with a phrase – like “let’s go,” “calm and confident,” or “Today is a wonderful day, I choose to make it so.”

Absorb light: In the morning and every hour throughout the day, flood your eyes with light. The brain responds to many signals, few are more powerful than light. The neurological link between the retina and the brain plays an important part in helping you keep focus and energy throughout the day.

Move: Get at least 5 minutes of light exercise in the morning and after dinner at night. In the morning, it sends a signal to increase calm energy. In the evening, it raises body temperature so you can sleep more soundly.

Eat smart: In the morning, eat a few bites of the meal that matters most. This tells your body to get ready to start the day.

Get a better grip: A large part of the brain is devoted to sensory and motor connections in the fingers. Enhanced brain function can come from improving the strength and dexterity of the fingers and hands. Squeeze a ball or crumple paper before throwing it in the recycling.

Continue breathing: When we are tense, our breathing becomes shallow. The rhythm of your breathing serves as a natural stimulus to the inner breathing of the hundred trillion cells in your body that enable you to produce calm energy. If you halt your breathing during the first moments of a stressful situation, it propels you toward feelings of anxiety, panic, anger, frustration, and loss of control. Keep breathing smoothly.

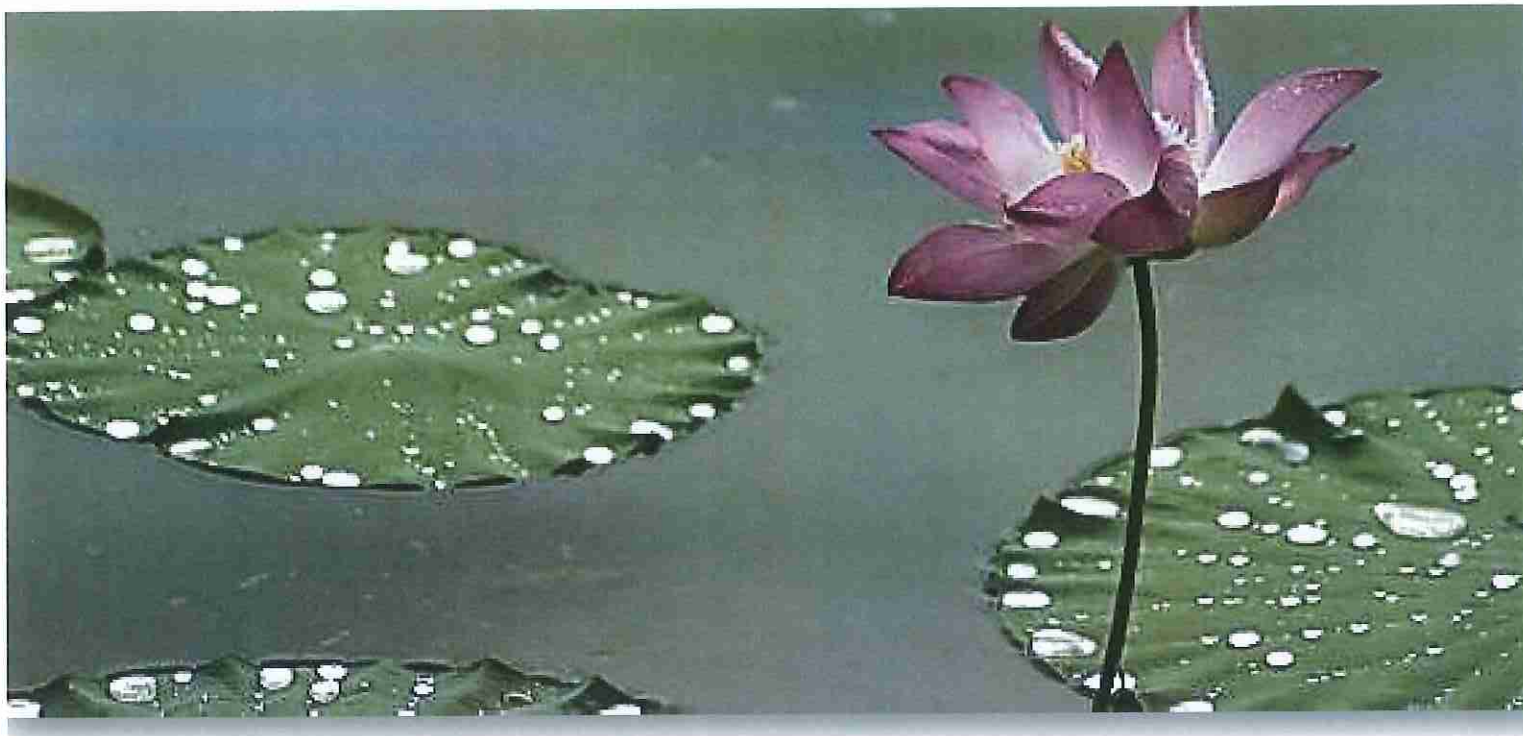
Courtesy of Ascension Wisconsin

Check your posture and facial expression: Unlocking your posture and face is one of the surest ways to overcome a common, debilitating reaction to fear or danger known as somatic retraction (slouching forward and tensing up). The face and hands signal to the body to either tense up or calm down. Lightening your eyes and smiling is a quick way to change the neurochemistry in your brain and program you for favorable emotions. One way to unlock your posture is to flash a mental “wave of relaxation” through your whole body, beginning with the muscles in your face and around your eyes and then right out through your fingertips and toes – as if you are standing under a waterfall that clears away all excess tension.

Toughen up YOUR lungs and legs: Regular aerobic exercise strengthens your ability to recover rapidly from high-stress situations. It also enables you to respond more energetically and appropriately to challenges. Aerobic exercise stimulates the optimal amount of the hormone norepinephrine. Low norepinephrine levels are associated with feelings of helplessness and a low tolerance for adversity. Exercise also boosts endorphins that enhance your energy and toughness and burn off excess stress hormones.

Write things down: There is evidence that writing can help people move through transitions and challenging times more quickly and less painfully. Write down what happened – what is challenging you, and how it feels, and then write down positive statements, like “Every day in every way I am getting better and better.”

Pull back to get ahead: Every hour take a strategic pause – 30 seconds to take a deeper breath than normal, straighten your posture, catch some light, and sip ice water. Also have a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack available to keep blood sugar even.



Mindfulness

STRESS is a struggle with what is. Stressed brains make reactive decisions. To reduce stress, learn to focus your attention to become relaxed, compassionate, nonjudgmental, sustained, deep, and intentional. Two tools to help train your mind to focus your attention are S.T.O.P. and R.A.I.N.

S.T.O.P.

S: Stands for “Stop” and Stabilize.” Invite yourself to briefly “step out” of your immediate reaction/emotional response. Pause for a moment.

T: Stands for “Take a Breath” and “Tranquility.” Bring your awareness to your breath. Allow your breath to center yourself/anchor your being.

O: Stands for “Observe” and “Open.” Observe what is happening with curiosity, rather than critical judgment. Listen to your self-talk.

P: Stands for “Proceed” and “Purpose.” Choose to proceed with more awareness, compassion, and intentionality.

R.A.I.N.

R: “Recognize” what is happening right now, without denial, suppression, or judgment. Focus your attention externally,

A: “Accept” whatever is happening in the moment, as best you can. This does not mean passive resignation. You are empowered to make choices, consider options, and respond from a place of composure and calmness..

I: “Investigate” your experience as it is in the present moment. Notice the “story” you are creating that distorts “what is.” Look honestly.

N: “Non-Identify” with the chatter in your mind and the emotional seduction of creating drama. Choose to “Stand outside” and feel yourself lean back to watch your thoughts, feelings, and emotions.



Resilience

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.

Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. Being resilient does not mean that a person does not experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

Some factors in resilience:

A combination of factors contributes to resilience. Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models, and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person’s resilience.

Here are some factors that people can develop in themselves:

- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses

Courtesy of Ascension Wisconsin

10 WAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Make connections: Good relationships with close family members, friends, or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who are around you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems: You cannot change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that change is part of living: Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move toward your goal: Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly – even if it seems like a small accomplishment – that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, “What’s one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?”

Take decisive actions: Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery: People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, a greater sense of personal strength even while feeling vulnerable, an increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and a heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a positive view of yourself: Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep things in perspective: Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Maintain a hopeful outlook: An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Take care of yourself: Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind, body, and spirit primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices can help build connections and restore hope. The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.



The Art of Self-Care

Practicing self-care requires intention. Be Compassionate and Gentle with yourself. Take time for self-care.

Practice acceptance | Stop comparing yourself to others and learn to embrace the person you are.

Declutter your space | Living in a cluttered, disorganized space creates a feeling of chaos within. Get rid of stuff that no longer serves you.

Pamper yourself | Simple self-care techniques like taking a walk in nature or prioritizing quality sleep are ways of respecting your mind-body-spirit.

Nourish your body | Replenish your body with clean water and real, whole food. Show your body that it matters by eating healthy food.

Leave yourself a note | Write yourself a loving affirmation note and post it where you will see it often. Choose an "I AM" password for your computer that affirms what you believe.

Choose your tribe wisely | Surround yourself with uplifting, supportive people. The energy of your inner circle is contagious.

Be grateful | Find things to be grateful for on a daily basis. If you tend toward negative mind chatter, gratitude helps quiet the mind.

Learn to let go | Accept that you cannot save everyone. Learn to establish healthy boundaries.

Get comfortable with me time | Treat yourself. Every now and then, pause to reenergize.

Take a tech time-out | Take time to unplug. How are you feeling? What are you thinking? What is going on in your body?

Start your day with a positive affirmation | Begin each day by asserting something positive about yourself.

Learn forgiveness | Learn to forgive yourself. If you have never failed, then you have never tried. And that is the ultimate failure.

Have fun | Life does not have to be so serious. Take time to play and laugh.

Learn to say no | Saying no makes room for yes! Set boundaries for yourself.

For your reflection:

"An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly."

~Unknown

"Find what makes your heart sing and create your own music. "

~Mac Anderson

"To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself."

~Thich Nhat Hanh

"Self-compassion is simply giving the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to others."

~Christopher Germer

"I will give thanks to you because I have been so amazingly and miraculously made. Your works are miraculous, and my soul is fully aware of this."

~Psalm 139:14

Courtesy of Ascension Wisconsin



Walking Meditation

The best way to learn to rest, to stop being carried away by regret, anger, or worries, is to breathe mindfully.

When we breathe and know that we are breathing, our wandering mind begins to rest on the pillow of breath. A feeling of calm and ease naturally arises.

The primary purpose of walking meditation is to completely enjoy the experience of walking. We do not walk to arrive or to attain a goal. Our destination is the here and now.

When we open ourselves to companions with us on the path, we open ourselves to life, transformation, and peace. Hear the birds, feel the air, smell the blossoms, and see the branches.



How to Walk Mindfully

Breathe Mindfully

- Pause and let your weight sink into the ground
- Fully relax your shoulders and loosen your jaws
- Close your eyes and relax your facial muscles
- Let a half smile emerge from your lips
- Let your breath flow naturally and allow the river of your breath carry your smile to every part of your body

Walk in Mindfulness

- Walk slowly
- Keep a light smile on your lips
- Let each step create a breeze of peace, joy, and harmony

Connect with Healing Elements

- Smile and say hello to what you see, hear, and contact
- Stop walking from time to time and simply breathe
- Be present to healing elements within you and around you

Brought to you by your Mission Integration Department

A white ceramic cup and saucer are centered on a rustic, weathered wooden surface. The cup is empty and has a simple handle. The saucer is plain white. The text is printed in a black, serif font on the inside of the cup. The background shows the natural grain and texture of the wood.

*You can't pour
from an empty cup.*

*You need to look
after yourself first
in order to have something
to offer others.*

Here are some ideas for self-care:

- Pre-schedule your self-care!
- Add a drop of lavender essential oil to a cotton ball, and inhale throughout the day for a feeling of calm.
- Put on a song that makes you want to dance.
- On a sticky note, jot down three things in your life you are grateful for and keep it in front of you.
- Stop and stretch once an hour. It is one of the kindest things you can do for yourself in 60 seconds.
- Drink your water. You will be more hydrated and might also feel less hungry, more energized, and more alert.
- Laugh daily. Laughter has numerous health benefits including lowering stress and improving your immune system.
- Accept your compliments. Do not deflect them. Do not minimize. The next time someone compliments you, look them in the eyes, say thank you and let it really sink in.