



Virtual Wellness Clinic
your online retreat

Take Back Control: Stress and Anxiety Programme

Supportive Handbook



Handbook Content

- Contra-Indications and Safeguards
- Suggestions for best online experience
- Theory and Reflective Practice Beginning
- Breathwork Practice Guidelines
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation Practice Guidelines
- Mindful Movement Practice Guidelines
- Reflective Practice Continued
- Pulling It All Together
- Practice Diary Sheet



Contra-Indications and Safeguards

- Those with physical or complex mental health issues or a formal diagnosis should consult a medical health practitioner before engaging in this programme.
- In particular, if you are diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, respiratory condition, high blood pressure, blood abnormalities, if you are pregnant or have ailments that cause seizures, kindly seek advice from a healthcare provider.
- This content material is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or psychological treatment.



How to create the best set up for your online experience

- Find where your wifi or mobile connection have the best reception, so that your connection is strong and video streaming goes smoothly;
- Do not listen to the videos while simultaneously doing a risky or distracting activity or task;
- Close other computer programs on your screen, to avoid anything popping up while listening to the videos;
- Make time and space in your day specifically for this practice. Choose a familiar, optimally lit, private space and Switch off your phone or other devices to avoid disturbances and/or distractions. Your comfort is key;
- Allow a few minutes of quiet time before your session;
- Recline or lay flat on a surface that is comfortable and most importantly, gives your back, neck and head ample support. Some people choose to laugh on a mat on the floor using the support of a pillow for their head. You can also recline on your couch and use a ottoman/footstool to elevate your legs;
- Pour yourself a glass of water and have it available to you in the some room. It is usual to feel thirsty after a session;
- Don't jump straight back into your work, e-mails, house chores, flatmates, family, or partner. Allow some time and space after the practice, to digest. This could be 10 min, or an hour, it's up to you.

Theory and Reflective Practice

Stress and Anxiety as an Alarm System

We are often anxious because of the possibility of something bad happening. The fight, flight or freeze mechanisms get activated with an obvious goal – to protect. The ultimate goal of our worry and anxiety is to protect us by preparing us.

Do you worry about something that has already happened?



Do you worry about something that could potentially happen?

Both?

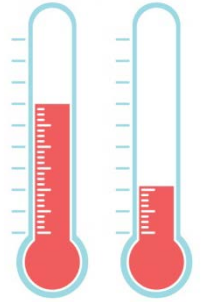
What is your worry possibly protecting you from? (E.g. embarrassment, failure, abandonment, judgment, disappointment etc)

Stress and Anxiety can be thought of as a scale that we move along from day to day.

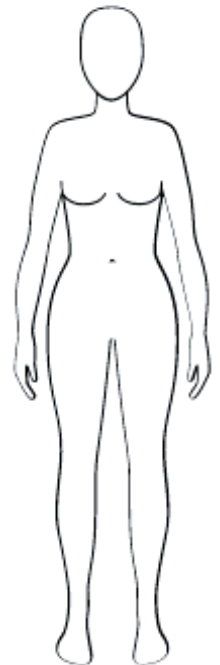
It is most commonly compared to a reappearing anticipation something to happen or an impending catastrophic scenario. The most common psychological and physiological symptoms are:

restlessness, irritability, headaches, muscle tension, difficulty concentrating, increased heart rate, trembling, blushing, sweatiness, shortness of breath, blurred vision and more.

What are my psychological and physical symptoms of worry and anxiety?



What are my earliest signs that I am starting to worry or to get anxious?



Physiological Symptoms Reduction

Once you have understood the need to reduce physiological response to stress and anxiety and you have been introduced to various physical methods, read through the Breathwork, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Mindful Movement Guidelines in the next pages and draft your plan for action. Refer to the Practice Diary Sheets at the end of this Handbook.

The practical modules aim to teach your body and your mind to relax. Once you become good at the practices you become more aware when stress tries to creep into your body and how to manage it.

Please, be aware that like any skill the practices take time to pick up and to get most out of them you are advised to remain committed and patient.



Breathwork: Guidelines

General instructions:

- Keep your nostrils clean by regular nasal wash (twice daily is recommended);
- If you are sick and/or your nose is blocked, do not practice pranayama;
- Always do your practice at the same time and place in order to make it a daily habit;
- Start with the simplest breathing technique and give yourself time to build it up gradually (practice one technique for at least 8 weeks in order to let it feel natural to you);
- Find a quite and warm place where you will not be disturbed;
- Wear comfortable and loose clothes (preferably made of natural materials like cotton);
- Practice with an empty stomach and empty bowel if possible;
- Find a comfortable seated position (either on floor on a meditation cushion or on a chair where your feet touch ground comfortably, if not put some support underneath your feet);
- Always keep your spine upright, send your shoulders down and back (shoulder blades closer to each other), neck tall and face muscles relaxed.

Further instructions:

- Make it a habit to take 3 deep and silent breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth to refresh your energy and mood whenever you need it.
- The 5+5+5+5 technique can be practiced at any time, any where and it is encouraged to be done if you feel anxious or find it hard to concentrate. (retentions should be avoided if you have a health condition).
- Learn how to breathe through diaphragm from our videos and practice abdominal breathing 5-10 minutes and 3-4 times daily until it becomes your natural way of breathing.
- Nadi Shodhana can be practiced any time of the day since it is a calming, balancing breath. If you are a beginner, start with single nostril breathing, 10 times each nostril then move on to Alternate Nostril breathing without retention, then when you feel ready, you can move on to Alternate Nostril breathing with retentions, gradually.
- If you find it hard to wake up in the morning, do single nostril breathing only through right nostril, if you find it hard to go to sleep easily, do single nostril breathing only through left nostril before you go to bed.(10-15 times recommended).
- You can use 4+7+8 breath technique not only to relax but also to go to sleep. But do this breathing technique no more than 4 repetitions in one go and no more than 8 repetitions in a day. Do this technique everyday at least 8 weeks to see positive results. Children who have not reached puberty yet should not practice this technique.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Guidelines

General instructions:

- Always do your practice at the same time and place in order to make it a daily habit;
- For best results PMR is recommended to be performed daily for 10 to 20 minutes (depending on time availability);
- First become aware how stress affects your body
- Find a quite and warm place where you will not be disturbed;
- Wear comfortable and loose clothes (preferably made of natural materials like cotton);
- Practice with an empty stomach and empty bowel if possible;
- Find a comfortable place to sit or lay down (either on bed, floor, a meditation cushion or on a chair where your feet touch the ground comfortably, if not put some support underneath your feet);
- Always keep your spine stretched, send your shoulders down and back (shoulder blades closer to each other), neck and face muscles relaxed.

Mindful Movement: Guidelines

- Setting

Try and set aside a space where you can be uninterrupted, with a yoga matt and a yoga block or large books, for specific exercises. Clothes should be comfortable. You can practice these exercises any time of the day, however the following sets can be useful to aid a restful night's sleep: calming the CNS through touch, releasing tension through movement and reciprocal breathing and child's pose.

- Frequency recommendations:

Most mindful movement sets are gentle exercise sets and could be practiced every day, as they are also shorter in length. However, there is always an invitation to listen to what your body needs and what it is capable of in the moment and on the day. Boundaries in the body could be a good option in the morning or even before doing something which you mentally or emotionally find challenging - by creating and feeling the boundaries in the body you sense into yourself.

- Progression to more advanced exercises:

There is no progression for these movement sets, however if you feel you need a little longer during certain parts of the sets, then you are invited to pause the video and feel into what is showing up for you, until you are ready to move on.

- Tracking your practice:

The Practice Diary Sheet has been created for you to record the sensation and affect of the practices, it's useful to reflect on these practices and how they make you feel. An offer to allow for your own free flowing writing or drawing, following mindful movement could be a good way to put into words what you have sensed in your body during your somatic enquiry. These are useful tools to express what is coming up and being released through movement.

Other recommendations/instructions:

- Some of these sets can be practiced whilst you are not at home, adapt them to your needs, finding a quiet space to your body if you feel you need space to remind yourself of your innate strength, boundaries or that which you are working on building.
- If you have a soundtrack or some music you would like to play you are welcome to play these in the background, if this promotes your experience and ability to listen within. Music is a wonderful art that can both up regulate or down regulate our mood, so use these to your advantage. Some people find that music with lyrics can lead them down a specific path, so classical music or music without lyrics could be more accessible for allowing your own experience.

Reflective Practice Continued

Worry types:

- Productive – helps stress before important events and to meet goals. It's a functional level of stress that we need. Helps us stay organised and focused on a goal.

Examples:

"I must read and study so that I can do well for the exam"

"I need to learn how to do this at work."

"I must make sure to leave on time to catch my plane"

"I must make an appointment"

- Unproductive – makes us worry and/or second guess ourselves in various situations (social, work etc). Relates to internalising (noticing internal physical or psychological processes) versus focusing on what is actually happening around us. Often leads to excessive reassurance seeking, avoidance and procrastination behaviours.

Examples:

"What if I fail my exam?"

"What if I don't enjoy my holiday?"

"What if she/he thinks I'm not good/smart/pretty enough?"

"What if she/he leaves me?"

"What if they see me sweat?"



What are your productive and unproductive worries about?

Productive:

Unproductive:

Tip: Try to notice the next time you worry about something and check in which category it falls. Write down 5 to 10 of your typical worries and try to categorise them.

Behaviours that Maintain Stress and Anxiety

Excessive reassurance seeking can over time reinforce a low self-trust and challenge our decision making.

- What situations make you seek reassurance?



- How often do you seek it? Does it fall in the excessive (challenging your decision making) category?

If the answer is Yes, then reduce the number of times in half and experiment with the outcome:

- Did anything bad happen?

- Do you feel proud of yourself for succeeding independently?

Another behaviour that can maintain Stress and Anxiety levels is the immediate search for certainty. Sometimes we struggle to tolerate uncertainty and this can lead to overthinking - considering a million scenarios (many of which catastrophic or just false), racing thoughts and worry.

Examples:

"I don't know where I will be going for dinner with my friends."

"I don't know what this person thinks of me."

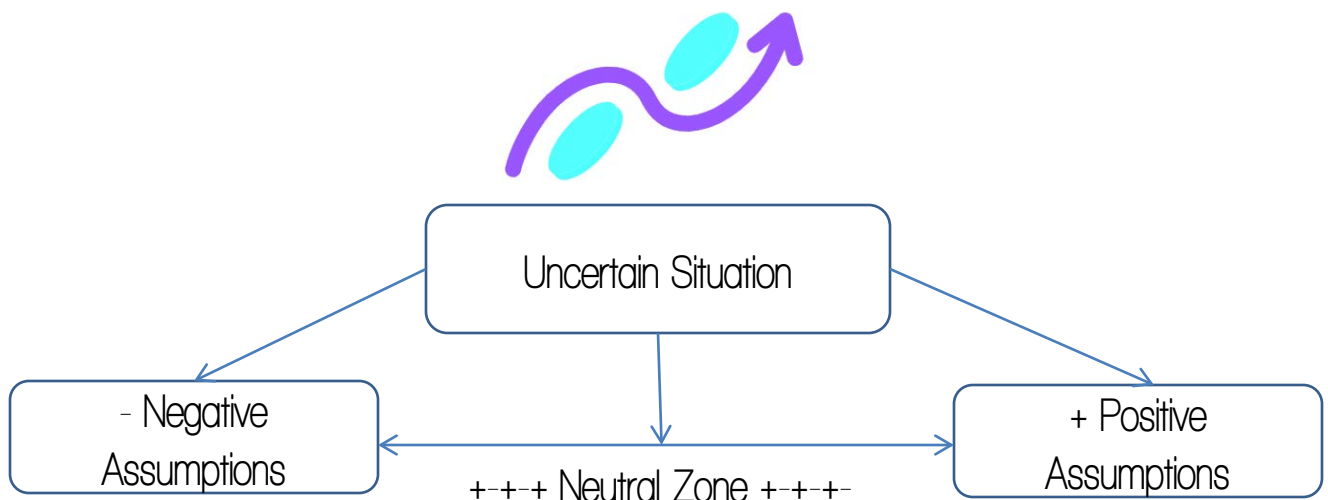
"I don't know what to expect on my holiday."

"I don't have a plan for the day."



Examine your beliefs and behaviours attached to uncertain situations by reflecting on:

- How do I react in the face of uncertainty? Think of the last uncertain situation you were face with and then go back in time. Can you identify a pattern of thinking and behaving?
- When faced with an uncertain situation where do you place yourself on the following scale? Is this a realistic position?



- Avoidance – immediate gratification versus long term build up of emotions (low self-trust, anxiety, fear)

Personal notes on how to reduce:

Reassume seeking:



Uncertainty toleration:

Avoidance:

Procrastination:

Thoughts that Trigger and Maintain Stress and Anxiety



- Negative Automatic Thoughts can cause worry and are often catastrophic in nature;
- They are based on emotions (e.g. a fear of something uncertain or a failure of some sort);
- These thoughts are often based on assumptions and not on real facts with actual evidence to support them;

What are your Negative Automatic Thoughts? (listen to your own thoughts and try to notice them)

Are they predictions of events that have not yet happened, or are they based on actual facts?

Try a 3 step reality check of your worries:

1. What is the situation that triggers worry? (Be specific about the situation you chose)

2. What are the thoughts that are attached to the situation? (List the chain of thoughts)

3. Are these thoughts based on facts or assumptions? (List all the evidence in support and against the thoughts)

Personal Beliefs and Learning



Mindreading – assuming that you know what someone else thinks of you

Do you think you have the “superpower” of mindreading?

When do you catch yourself using this “superpower” the most?

Observation mode – when we put uncertain situation (e.g. what someone else thinks of you) under observation for some time, not assuming, not mindreading, not jumping to conclusions, not avoiding but giving a chance for real and actual evidence to present itself. Observation mode is simply observing without attaching emotions that might fog perception. Experiment with and learn by using “observation mode”.

What can you put into an observation mode?

What would you tell a friend if they are in a situation where they are mindreading/overthinking/catastrophising ? What if you act like your own friend?

Let Your Rational Voice Be Heard



It's **NOT** All-or-Nothing.

Review the **evidence**.

Be **factual**.

Don't **assume**.



Self-critical Voice Sounds Like

You are lazy.

You are useless.

You are not good.

You suck at conversation.



Rational Response Sounds Like



Self-compassionate validation +

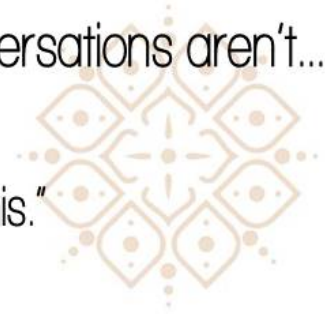
Rational response

"Well, it wasn't perfect...

... but most conversations aren't...

...The other person was just as involved.

It's my perception. I have a tendency to do this."



Now, try to apply the above "formula" to your own situations and experiences. How would that look:

Pulling it all Together:

How will I apply this learning?

Tips:

- Circle 1 or more from the tools in the table below and apply them for the next month;
- Use the Record Diary Sheet to record your practice and to remain accountable;
- Visit our website free Resources with information about motivation and accountability.;
- Listen to this programme multiple times, take notes and reflect on personal examples;
- Identify the things stopping you;
- Get in touch with one of our therapists if you require further individual support and guidance;

Reducing physical symptoms:	Regular relaxation practice Breathwork Mindfulness practices Physical activity
Reducing negative thoughts and assumptions:	Cognitive awareness Reframing critical voice Compassionate inner voice
Reducing behaviours: (avoidance, reassurance seeking, checking)	Rationalising Growth mindset
Building trust in yourself:	Tolerant of uncertainty Experimenting and learning



Virtual Wellness Clinic
your online retreat

Practice Diary

Before and after each practice, rate between 0-10 how stressed you feel. Record what type of practice you did and leave any reflective comments (what else did you feel, what thoughts did you have)

	Time	Practice type	Stress level before	Stress level after	Reflections, feelings, thoughts, comments
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					

