

Breathe easier...

7. Mindfulness

PATIENT INFORMATION

The information given below is designed to help you manage your stable long-term breathlessness. If your breathing is getting worse, or you are experiencing breathlessness as a new feeling, it is important to seek medical advice from your GP.

Mindfulness

When we are worried or stressed, perhaps by a chronic illness, family worries, financial worries, or other difficult circumstances, it is very easy to spend most of the time thinking about the past, dwelling on things that have gone wrong or worrying about the future and being fearful about things that might happen.

The body responds to worry and stress by increasing the production of stress hormones which lead to the fight or flight response as described in Leaflet 5: Managing Thoughts. Increasingly, research has suggested that reducing the level of stress hormones can help us to cope better and feel better. One way of reducing the level of stress that we feel is by learning how to practise a technique called 'mindfulness'.

Mindfulness is when we are able to adopt a 'mindful awareness of the present'. Most people are aware that if they see (or think about) something they enjoy, such as chocolate, even the very anticipation of eating it can bring pleasure. The explanation for why this occurs lies in the internal chemistry of the brain; the experience of pleasure results from chemical changes in the brain.

The change in the chemical reaction in the brain can also reduce anxiety - this is the way that anxiety-reducing drugs work. By practising mindfulness we can reduce the amount of stress we feel and the impact of the stress on the brain. However, it does take a bit of practice.

There are a range of mindfulness options available, such as books, CDs, websites or apps, such as Smiling Mind which can be used with the same regularity as you might take a tablet. Initially, we would suggest that you chose one and use it twice a day. It is most helpful when you can be in a quiet place and not disturbed. We recommend that you use at a time when you can arrange not to have to answer the telephone and when it is unlikely that you will have to answer other people's needs. It is fine to use it late at night, but if you fall asleep quickly after starting to use it, it will not give you as much training in experiencing the mindfulness that will help you manage stressful situations.

We have found that some people like to use it with their husband, wife, partner, child or carer so that they can both get the benefit from it. You may prefer to use it separately.

After a couple of weeks of using your chosen mindfulness program regularly, you may start to notice that worries or concerns seem to come into your mind without making you feel anxious and disturbed.

You may also find that you start to relax and get more pleasure from the simpler things in your life – music, trees blowing in the wind, a friend's smile. If at the end your chosen mindfulness program you would like to take mindfulness training further, please do not hesitate to ask your GP how you can do this.



Acknowledgement

The information in this leaflet and the other seven patient information leaflets in this series have been developed by the Breathlessness Intervention Service, Box 63 Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ cuh.org.uk. Please see the original versions on their website at cuh.nhs.uk/our-services/breathlessness-intervention-service/patient-information-leaflets.

For more information

Please see your local GP or specialist for further information about breathlessness.

Visit our website page to download the other leaflets in the set: nwmphn.org.au/dyspnoeapathways

For information about The Collaborative email: TheCollaborative@nwmphn.org.au

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