

6 Ideas for Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

#1 De-stress 'shake it out' technique

Stress and anxiety generate hormones in our brain and body, which need to be released, or countered with other feelings. One of the best ways to 'complete the stress cycle' is through physical activity. This simple, fun 'Shake it Out' technique can be used by the whole family in very limited space.

Stand with your feet about a hip's width apart, or a little bit wider. Bend your knees slightly and, being mindful not to injure yourself, begin shaking your whole body. Shake however feels good to you, gently or more intensely. This allows a physical release for hormones triggered by stress and anxiety and helps to calm our body and mind. On each out-breath, make sounds to help release anxiety, as quietly or as loudly as you like. Shake and sound for at least two minutes, longer if it feels good. Follow with number 2 below, for a de-stress and relax combination.

With thanks to www.katie-love.com

#2 Immune System Boosting Heart-Brain Practice

Stand in quiet and put a finger or hand on your sternum, in the centre of your body level with your heart. Call to mind feelings of gratitude, appreciation, care or compassion as you take long slow breaths in and out. This simple exercise has been shown to boost the immune system and feelings of wellbeing, and the effects have been shown to last up to 6 hours. This exercise is a great way to follow the 'Shake it Out' technique above.

With thanks to www.greggbraden.com

#3 Feelings of Safety

The threat of illness, financial challenges, or feelings of stress themselves can make us feel unsafe. Feeling safe is foundational to our wellbeing and ability to function well and think clearly. Whatever is going on 'outside', there are simple ways that we can help create feelings of safety in our body.

Visualisation

Allow at least 10 minutes for this exercise. Sit or lie quietly. Put on gentle music without words if you would like. Ensure that you are in a place which is calm and relaxing, and that you are not going to be interrupted. Close your eyes and take long, slow breaths, in and out. Lengthening our breaths activates the parasympathetic nervous system which generates feelings of calm. Pay attention to any sensations in your body. Try not to label them ('stress'; 'fear'), but to simply notice the sensations – tingling, moving energy, feelings of heat or cold etc. Paying attention to body sensations is grounding, and helps us to stay in the here and now and to calm our minds.

Call to mind a calm, restful place. It might be somewhere you have been, or an imaginary place. It might be a beach, a meadow, a mountainside in sunshine, or a cosy indoor space. Call to mind as many details as you can. What is the temperature? How does the sun feel on your skin? What can you hear? Feel? See? Smell? Continue to take long, slow breaths, and rest awhile in your calm place.

When you are ready, slowly and gently bring your attention back to your body, and then to the feeling, sounds and smells of the room that you are in. Only then open your eyes and take time to readjust back to the present moment.

Cosy Tent/Cave/Den

This activity is great for children and adults. Our emotional sense of safety is very influenced by our body experiences. By taking steps to feel safe, warm and cosy, we create a store of body sensation memories that we can return to, creating a feeling of safety, whatever the external circumstances.

Create a 'den/tent/cave' in your home. You might drape a spare bed sheet or blankets over chairs. The important thing is to create a cosy space. Furnish your cosy space with cushions and cuddly toys. Make sure that it is warm, or wrap yourself in a blanket. You might like to prepare a warm drink to enjoy inside. Once inside, ensure that you are cosy and comfortable. Sit in a relaxed

position and cuddle a cushion or cuddly toy. Close your eyes and take long, slow breaths, in and out. Take care, if you have hot drinks, that they won't be spilt whilst eyes are closed. If you are with children, you might guide them in a gentle, calm voice, through these steps. Continue to breathe deeply and slowly for a few moments. Then take time to pay attention to the feeling of warmth; to the feeling of being in a cosy, enclosed, calm space. After a few moments paying mindful attention to these sensations, put your hand on your heart. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply, and imagine storing these feelings of warmth, calm and safety in your heart. Visualise holding them there in your mind's eye.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and reacclimatise to the room. Continue to sit in your 'den' whilst you enjoy your drink, and for as long as you would like. At times when you begin to feel stressed, anxious or unsafe, put your hand over your heart area and remind yourself of the feelings you have created through this activity.

With thanks to Emma Spiegler www.emmaspiegler.com

#4 Dance

You don't need to know particular steps. Just put on your favourite, up-beat tunes and follow your body! Dancing is great for stretching and moving; great for getting your heart pumping; great for releasing stress hormones. Your body will produce endorphins which enhance wellbeing. It's also great for your brain. More than any other measured activity, studies have shown that regular dancing can reduce your risk of dementia by 76%. It enhances neuroplasticity (the brain's capacity to adapt) and prevents mental decline. It can also improve intelligence, slow aging and boost memory.

Why not have a designated time to dance each day over the coming weeks while life has a different rhythm.

With thanks to <https://www.lifehack.org/374710/5-things-that-will-happen-to-your-brain-when-you-dance>

#5 Laugh

- Watch something funny (search online for videos of your favourite comedian, or rewatch a well-loved comedy show)
- Tell jokes (search online or in a joke book)
- Sit with others and just laugh – make a big, belly laugh. Initially you'll be forcing it but pretty soon the laughs will be genuine. You could also do this via a video call if you are self-isolating.
- If you are in a home with others (and none of you are unwell), play 'the laughing game'. Lie on the floor, have someone else lie with their head on your stomach, the next person with their head on their stomach etc. The person at the top of the chain says 'Ha'; the next person says 'Haha'; then 'Hahaha' and so on, down the chain and around and around. See how long it takes for the whole chain to dissolve into giggles.
- Read a funny book
- Spend time playing with young children, or a dog
- Play party-style games such as charades or taboo. You could also try this over video call.
- Give yourself permission to be silly, and laugh at yourself.
- Create a pinterest board of funny memes
- Start a 'quotes board' or scrapbook of funny things you see or hear
- Start a 'joke jar'. Put lots of jokes in a jar, then at a mealtime, pull a joke out of the jar. Share it with those around you, be that in person or via text, WhatsApp or social media
- Try laughter meditation:
 - 1) Find a comfortable place to sit.
 - 2) Bring your attention to your breath and release all tension from your body.
 - 3) Bring up an image of something you find really funny. Once you have the feeling of laughter, spread it throughout your body, from the top of your head, to the tip of your toes.
 - 4) Bring up another image that makes you laugh.
 - 5) Continue spreading the feeling of laughter throughout your body.

With thanks to www.daringtolivefully.com

#6 Gratitude

There is strong scientific evidence that gratitude improves mental wellbeing over the long term. In times of uncertainty, when many of the usual things in life have been taken away, focusing on what we do have, rather than what we don't, can be a powerful way to change perspective and feel good.

Here are some ways to build gratitude into your daily routine:

- Gratitude wall: Find a space in the house where you can start a gratitude wall. Find 10 things to add to it each day. You could stick up the words, write them on paper that you have stuck to the wall, or use magazines to find pictures to put on your wall.
- Before or during a meal: While eating together, go round and each find 3 things you are grateful for. You could do this to start the day, or with the evening meal.
- Gratitude jar: each day, write things you're each grateful for and add them to the jar; or add a marble for each thing you mention.
- Gratitude competition: see who can think of the most things to be grateful for!

Be sure to revisit this so that it's not just a one-off activity. There is power in returning each day to what you are grateful for.

For more ideas

There are so many websites, blogs and videos online with guided meditations and other ideas. Here are some we've found. Please note that these sites are intended as helpful suggestions. They are not endorsed by Adfam and we take no responsibility for content of external sites:

<https://www.facebook.com/biglifejournal/>

<https://thegreenparent.co.uk/articles/read/lockdown-life-savers>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health>