

# **Working for Wellness at Work**

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT MANUAL**

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# **WORKING FOR WELLNESS EDUCATION**

## **Introduction to Working for Wellness**

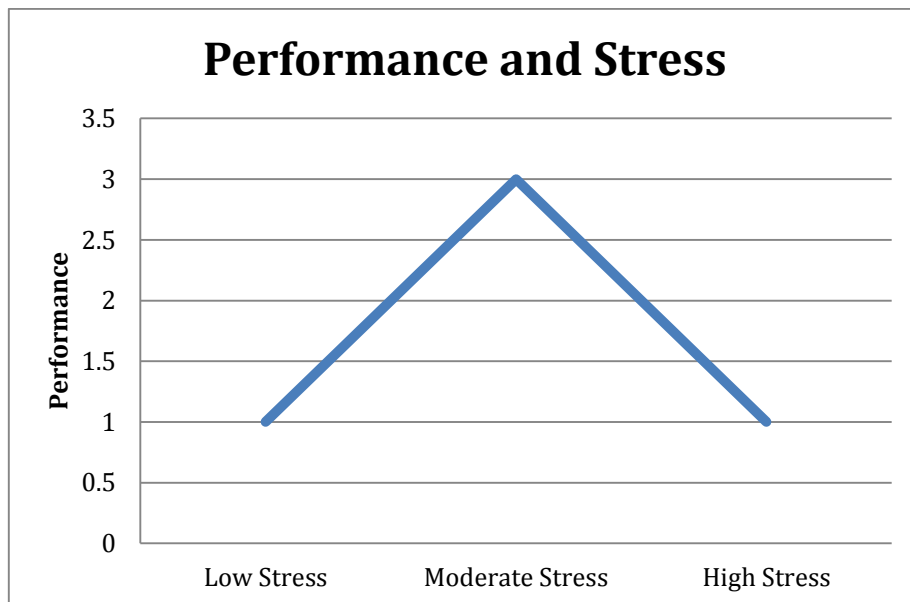
Working for Wellness is an evidence-informed stress management manual that mental health providers can utilize to help employees manage stress. This manual includes information on, and instructions for how to practice, a variety of mindfulness techniques shown to enhance well-being and help regulate stress. Some of these techniques include controlled breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, and several others. This course aims to help employees improve life satisfaction, wellness, self-regulation abilities, and productivity. In addition, these methods are designed to minimize maladaptive stress responses.

## Education Part I: What is Stress?

"Stress is the inability to cope with a perceived or real threat to one's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing which results in a number of physiological responses and adaptations" (Seaward, 1994). For example, when faced with a saber tooth tiger, early humans experienced a strong stress response. Modern day humans also experience stress, but stressors are rarely life threatening. For instance, a typical stressor may be that an urgent task is put on us near the end of an already busy day. Or, we may experience ongoing stress due to difficult coworkers, relationship difficulties, etc. In all of these cases we as will experience stress, and will undergo physiological changes that prepare us to best deal with that stress.

The functions of stress are to motivate us and to prepare our minds and bodies for action. Stress is linked to the "fight or flight" (or freeze) response, first described by Walter Cannon (1929). As Cannon noted, this response is very important in times of danger, and in the past was connected to our survival as a species. Primitive humans needed the fight or flight response to survive and evolve. This response produces a very fast burst of energy to prepare us to fight or run from predators (or in some instances, to freeze). Thus, the fight or flight response, also called the "stress response," can be adaptive, especially in dangerous situations.

Moreover, some level of stress can be helpful in day-to-day situations, even when we are not in danger. Research has shown that productivity and performance is highest, for example, when we are under low to moderate levels of stress. This graph, though oversimplified, demonstrates general idea:



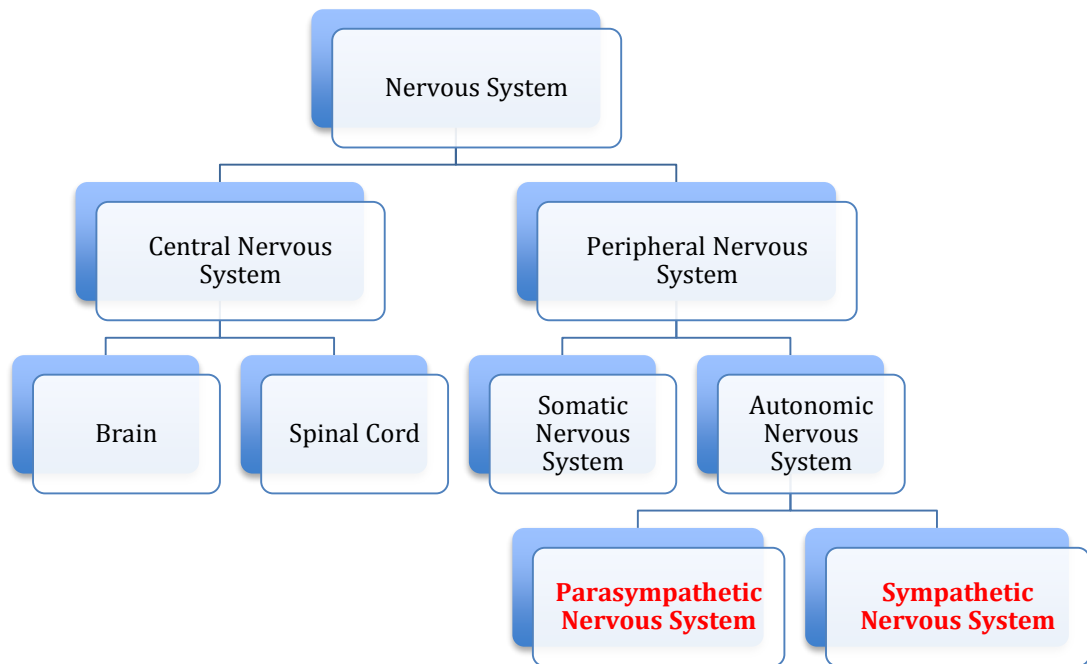
Some level of stress is important if we are to be motivated, productive, high performing individuals. Imagine experiencing no stress whatsoever. How would you motivate yourself to get anything done? If you were never the least bit nervous about an upcoming exam, how would you have ever motivated yourself to study? Having low to moderate levels of stress inspires us to take action. However, as the graph shows, we cease to function well if stress becomes too high. (The explanations for this are presented in the next two sections). Thus, the goals of stress management are to become aware of and *regulate* stress, not eliminate it. Our ability to become stressed is helpful so long as it enhances our functioning.

However, what if stress gets too high? We know that performance will plummet, but what else happens if, for instance, the very intense fight or flight response is triggered when we're not facing a bear (or other imminently dangerous situation)? When does stress turn destructive, and what are the consequences of maladaptive stress, also called "distress"? Stress transforms into distress when the stress response is prolonged or too intense. For stress to be healthy in day-to-day situations it should be fairly mild. It should not, for instance, become as intense as the fight or flight response we would experience when facing a tiger. If stress is too intense in the wrong situation, it becomes distress. Also, we should expect to return to a low-stress state once a threat or stressor is resolved. If this does not happen and stress is prolonged, the stress becomes chronic distress.

In particular, the type of stress that is most problematic for modern day humans is chronic stress, not necessarily intense, acute stress. This is likely due to the nature of our problems, and due to our cognitive abilities. Take for instance the example of being chased by a bear. This incident will not result in chronic stress because, for better or worse, the stress will end quickly (either by being eaten, escaping, or killing the bear). However, a rocky marriage could easily last several months, creating months' worth of chronic stress that can wreak havoc on our bodies and minds. Also, as humans we have higher order cognitive abilities that most other species lack. Specifically, humans have the ability to reason, plan, strategize, worry, and think about the past and future. Many other species cannot engage in such cognitive functions. While our cognition is impressive and immensely helpful, the downside is that we often prolong and exacerbate our own stress with our ability to do complex mental gymnastics. Unfortunately, when stress is chronic, even at a low level, we put our physical, emotional, and mental health at risk.

## Education Part II: The Science of Stress

When we are stressed, the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) becomes activated. This is essentially what stress is – stress is sympathetic nervous system (SNS) hyperarousal. This SNS activation sets in motion a cascade of other physical and mental reactions. A straightforward depiction of the ANS, and its relation to other systems, is below:



The ANS, which is part of the Peripheral Nervous System, is responsible for regulating involuntary functions such as heart rate, digestion, hormone secretion, and other tasks. Within the ANS is the SNS, otherwise known as the “stress response,” or fight or flight or freeze response (as previously discussed). The SNS activates parts of our bodies that help us prepare to get away from, or fight off, threats. The activation of the SNS is adaptive when faced with a life-threatening situation, such as being attacked in a dark alley, where we need to react very fast. As humans we likely would not have evolved if we did not have this response to threat. However, the SNS is referred to as “catabolic,” meaning that its activation leads to the breakdown of our bodies. This breakdown is due to the energy that must be expended to create and maintain this state. Thus, not surprisingly, we tend to feel worn out and exhausted (mentally, physically, and emotionally) after experiencing SNS activation. Because SNS activation is so tiring and destructive (when it is maintained over long periods), we do not want arouse the SNS unless it is absolutely needed.

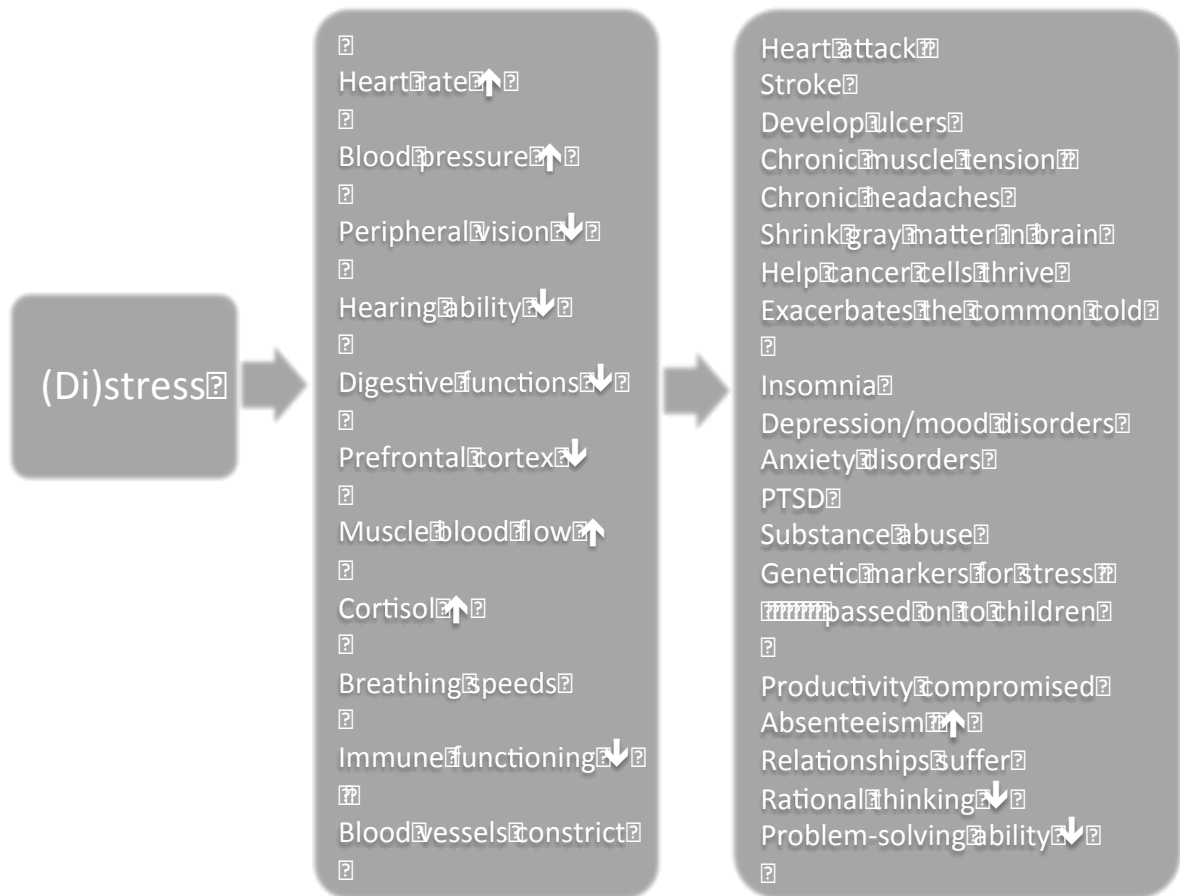
The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), on the other hand, is “anabolic,” and is often called the “rest and digest” branch because it helps us to regenerate and heal our bodies. We want to activate our PNS as much as possible because it rejuvenates us emotionally, mentally, and physically, and when in this state we feel relaxed. Because the SNS and PNS work in opposite ways, they are referred to as antagonistic, meaning that only one of these systems can dominate at once. In other words, you cannot be stressed and relaxed at the same time! This is only good news if you can control which state you are in, and research indicates that we can. We can minimize SNS activation while promoting PNS activation, and the exercises in this manual work to accomplish just that.

Next, we will take a closer look at the consequences to SNS arousal. There are immediate and more long-term consequences to SNS arousal depending on how long, and to what extent we are stressed. The picture below relays the idea that distress has immediate consequences that can evolve into longer-term disorders, diseases, or other illnesses.



There are several SNS arousal consequences. In fact, there are over 1,400 near-immediate biochemical and physiological changes associated with SNS activation. In addition, longer-term stress is linked to the development of numerous mental disorders, and approximately 2/3 of all doctors’ visits are accounted for by stress (Benson, 1997). The diagram below outlines a few common SNS activation correlates.





As you can see from the few examples presented above, especially the ones presented in the right column (the long-term consequences), stress can come with a large price tag. The long-term consequences are especially concerning because they tend to be more severe, and often require extensive intervention. This is the level at which individuals can develop a mental disorder, suffer a serious illness, and experience substantial functional challenges in multiple domains. This is when EAP calls are placed, and when individuals begin making doctors' appointments. While it is imperative to seek help at this level, it is preferable to intervene *before* symptoms become this severe. In other words, for our own health it is important to take a preventative stance when it comes to stress management. In order to do this, we need to learn and practice skills that reduce stress to a more manageable level through the development of ANS control. This is the goal of stress management techniques.

## Education Part III: The Neuroscience of Stress

Taking a preventative approach to stress management is important not only because it can reduce our risk of developing a longer-term illness, but also because some of the shorter-term consequences of stress can impact our ability to function optimally. In particular, there are short-term neural changes that occur when we are under stress that undermine our ability to think rationally and control our emotions. When we are distressed, our brains actually change. Neuroscientists have observed neural changes in several areas, but there are two major brain regions implicated in stress for you to remember: the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex.

### **Amygdala:**

The amygdala is the “emotional, animalistic” part of the brain. It helps us remember emotionally-relevant events, especially those which produce fear or threaten us. The amygdala is activated during stressful situations, and this makes sense evolutionarily. Take for example an early human who stood at the edge of a cliff, fell off but caught himself, then climbed back up. If this human does not remember the danger he was in, and therefore repeats that error, he likely did not survive to reproduce. But the human who learned from that fear-provoking situation avoided it in the future, and therefore remained alive and able to pass on his genes. Thus, having the amygdala activated during very stressful situations is helpful; it helps us remember past stressful events so that we never repeat them.

However, while amygdalar activation helps us better remember events or information related to the experience of fear, its activation can actually *prevent* us from accessing other memories, which are stored in other areas of the brain. Also, amygdalar activation can impair our ability to think rationally by overriding other areas of the brain responsible for rational thought (such as the prefrontal cortex). When in distress, we become so focused on the target of our distress that we can’t think about other things. If we are under high stress this area of the brain comes online, thinking that it needs to encode this (presumably) dangerous situation into our brains. But what if this happens when it does not need to, when we are not actually in danger? The result is that our “emotional brain” takes over, and our ability to think rationally becomes compromised.

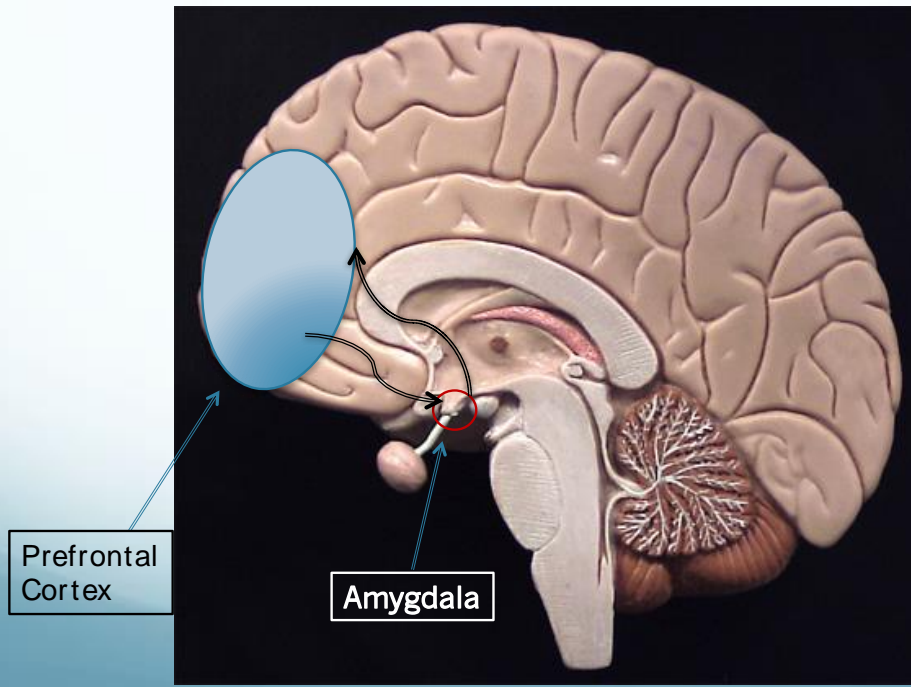
### **Prefrontal Cortex:**

The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is the “thinking part” of the brain. It is the area that allows us to plan, strategize, inhibit inappropriate responses, regulate emotion, keep perspective, and concentrate. In a sense, this area of the brain makes us human; animals’ prefrontal cortexes tend to be pretty small compared to humans’. However, in humans this region is quite large, and it allows us to enjoy higher-level cognitive functioning. If you’ve ever, while under a low level of stress, restrained yourself from saying or doing something you would have regretted, you can thank your PFC for helping you to make the right decision. The PFC reminded you that, despite your emotional reaction, it is best to refrain from sending that nasty email. As long as the PFC isn’t inhibited (by overactivation of the amygdala, for

example), we can stay in control of our responses and think clearly.

When this area is suppressed, however, we actually “lose our mind” in a sense! PFC activation is not all-or-nothing, rather, it can be activated to varying degrees. The extent to which the PFC is dominant depends in part on our level of stress. In the case of mild stressors we might actually perform *better* than usual, as our stress-related emotions are motivating us to take some action. But with too much stress, our thinking abilities begin to decline. These pictures below demonstrate what happens when we are stressed out, and show the relationship between the amygdala and PFC.

## Prefrontal Cortex and Amygdala



## **Education Part IV: Overview of Stress Management Strategies**

When we are distressed we experience interacting physical, mental, and emotional consequences. This is perhaps not surprising, since our minds and bodies are inextricably linked. Examples of this “mind-body connection” are not difficult to find. For example, chronic hyperarousal (a key feature of some stress disorders) impacts both the mind and the body, and the effects are interrelated; hyperarousal symptoms associated with stress are known to be linked to heart attacks, which are linked to the development of anxiety disorders. By treating anxiety disorders, not only does an individual suffer less emotionally, but they improve their physical health as well. For instance, heart problems may decrease, and ulcers may become less problematic. Thus, it makes sense that we can attack stress primarily through the mind, the body, or a combination of both.

All of the techniques in this manual contain both cognitive (“through the mind”) and behavioral (“through the body”) elements. While the techniques vary in the extent to which they are classified as cognitive and/or behavioral, most of the techniques described in this manual are primarily behavioral, and each contains several mindfulness components. With practice and experience, individuals can discover for themselves the type(s) of stress management approaches and techniques that work best for them.

## **Education Part V: What is Mindfulness Practice?**

### **History of Mindfulness**

For over 2,500 years mindfulness-based techniques have been a critical component of Eastern mental and physical health care (Dryden & Still, 2006). A concept stemming in ancient Buddhist philosophy (Bhikkhu, 2010), mindfulness techniques were not brought to the United States until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and did not begin to grow in popularity until the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Western practitioners only began utilizing mindfulness approaches in the treatment of physical and mental illness around the early 1980s, thus, the incorporation of mindfulness techniques into Western health practices is relatively recent.

### **Cross Cultural Applications of Mindfulness**

It should be noted that although mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist spiritual practice, it is comprised of techniques and practices that have widespread cross-cultural applications. As Baer (2003) asserted, mindfulness can easily be learned and taught by Westerners who do not subscribe to, or rely on, Buddhism. According to Dimidjian and Linehan (2003), the secularization of mindfulness for Western psychotherapy has not been difficult. Kabat-Zinn (2000) concurred, stating that mindfulness techniques are beneficial to individuals who do not identify as Buddhist, and noting that clinicians and researchers can successfully teach mindfulness skills without requiring participants to adopt any particular cultural or religious tradition (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). The cross cultural applicability of mindfulness techniques may be in part explained by the large weight that is placed on experiential awareness, as opposed to any culturally-specific information.

### **Mindfulness Defined**

While the practice of mindfulness is not new, research on mindfulness techniques is still in its naissance, and defining mindfulness has been a work in progress (Hayes & Shenk, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In the literature mindfulness has been described as a skill, a technique, a method, and/or a psychological process that enhances awareness and attention (Bishop et al., 2004; Germer, 2005; Hayes & Shenk, 2004). For example, Bishop and colleagues (2004) defined mindfulness as “an approach for increasing awareness and responding skillfully to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior” (p. 230). Similarly, Kabat-Zinn (2003) described mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment” (p. 145). Germer (2005) also described mindfulness in terms of awareness, stating that mindfulness “is to wake up, to recognize what is happening in the present moment” (p. 24). Moreover, Linehan (1993) asserted that mindfulness includes ongoing attention to various aspects of one’s environment.

While some authors highlight attention and awareness as core components of mindfulness, others emphasize a slightly different concept: immersion and full engagement in the moment, but without judgment. Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) defined mindfulness as the experiencing of the present moment. Kabat-Zinn (1994) added that taking a nonjudgmental stance while experiencing life is important, stating that one should pay “attention in a particular way: on purpose, and in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). Bear (2003) agreed, recommending that those practicing mindfulness adopt a nonjudgmental approach to observing and experiencing the constant stream of stimuli that will pass through awareness. Put succinctly, in mindfulness “you are not a judge but a scientist” (Rahula, 1974; p. 73). Thus, while attention to and awareness of the present moment are important, it is also recommended that one fully experience the moment without judgment.

Closely related to nonjudgment are the concepts of acceptance and nonattachment. Martin (1997) described mindfulness as “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (p. 291), and Germer and colleagues (2005) noted that mindful attention should be accompanied by “gentle acceptance” (p. xiii). Ladner’s definition of mindfulness also includes the concept of acceptance and nonattachment, although those exact terms are not used. Ladner (2005) stated that mindfulness produces a state of mind that is “aware of our thoughts without identifying with them or allowing them to take over” (p. 19). The phrase “without identifying with them” implies acceptance and nonjudgment.

Ladner’s (2005) definition of mindfulness also suggests that self-regulation is a component of mindfulness techniques, as the author stated that in mindfulness one’s thoughts are not allowed to “take over” (p. 19). Goleman and Schwartz (1976) concur, asserting that mindfulness involves the regulation of oneself from moment to moment. Bishop and colleagues (2004) clarified that self-regulation is advised with respect to attention. They stated that that mindfulness involves “self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events occurring in the moment” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232).

As the many mindfulness definitions here indicate, the various elements of mindfulness interact. Most of the definitions provided in this paper indicate that while researchers have developed different ways of describing mindfulness, most of the definitions and descriptions are consistent with one another. The components of awareness, attention, experiencing, nonjudgment, acceptance, nonattachment, and self-regulation are interrelated. For example, self-regulation is needed for ongoing attention and awareness. Also, nonjudgment is often required for acceptance, and one cannot manage attachment if there is no experiencing, awareness, and self-regulation. While none of the definitions here capture all of these elements and their relation to one another, as a whole the English literature on mindfulness emphasizes the significance of each of them.

## Education Part VI: Components of Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness is a set of skills, or techniques, that improve awareness and attention. These skills include methods such as meditation or mindful breathing. All mindfulness skills fall under the large umbrella of mindfulness. When a person is mindful, they are fully engaged and focused on the present moment. Also, being mindful means being a scientist, not a judge – while you’re a self-aware observer who is fully present in the situation, you aren’t judging your experience. Mindfulness encourages us to be fully here, in this moment with ourselves, without evaluating what’s going on, or ourselves, as good or bad. We allow experiences to be present, and we also allow experiences, thoughts, and emotions to pass through us without clinging to them (called non-attachment). Finally, there is the idea of self-regulation, the ability to control and guide your own behavior. In mindfulness one objective is to self-regulate attention. Specifically, we want to regulate our attention to keep it on the present moment. Thus, when we feel our attention shifting away from the present moment to other thoughts, we “regulate” the attention by bringing it back to the mindfulness practice. To summarize, here are the objectives of mindfulness:

### Mindfulness Components:

1. Awareness (internal).
2. Attention
3. Experiencing
4. Nonjudgment
5. Acceptance
6. Non-attachment
7. Self-regulation

These components are interrelated, and are both components, and goals, of mindfulness practice.

### **A note about acceptance... Acceptance is NOT:**

- Lying down in defeat
- Becoming passive or submissive
- Saying that something is okay with you, or does not upset you
- Agreeing with something that is against your values
- Forgiveness

### **Acceptance IS:**

- Simply acknowledging the current state of things
- When you stop trying to change the things that cannot be reversed
- When you start focusing on the things in your life that you CAN change or control

The Serenity Prayer nicely illustrates what we mean by “acceptance”:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,*

*the courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

(Jennifer Sweeton, Psy.D., Workings of Well-Being, Inc.)

Mindfulness exercises all aim increase our sense of well-being, in addition to becoming more mindful and self-aware in daily life. While mindfulness practices are often used to increase relaxation and reduce stress and suffering, these were not the primary purposes of mindfulness. Mindfulness is meant to teach individuals to respond skillfully to distressing emotional conditions and better manage behavior. Thus, mindfulness does not primarily aim to “fix” problems, but helps individuals better manage negative conditions and suffering. The increased awareness and regulation in turn often lead to an improvement in mental and physical conditions. These are considered positive effects of mindfulness practice.



## Education Part VII: Why Practice Mindfulness?

One general strategy for addressing maladaptive stress and anxiety is the practice of mindfulness skills. Research has shown many of these mindfulness skills to be quite effective in the management of stress and anxiety. Mindfulness may work through many mechanisms, but researchers and mindfulness experts believe that its efficacy is due, in part, to mindfulness' induction of the relaxation response. The relaxation response, first studied by Dr. Herbert Benson in the 1960s, is characterized by a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and metabolic rate, which is exactly the opposite of what the fight or flight stress induces. Thus, to counter the effects of stress, individuals can learn mindfulness practices to induce the relaxation response. This tends to work well, since it's not possible to experience the stress response and the relaxation response at the same time. In other words, if you can make yourself relax, you can't possibly continue to be stressed at the same time.

Also, although there is not agreement on a single purpose of mindfulness, several have been proposed by various practitioners and researchers. For many providers, mindfulness exercises are used for the purpose of managing a variety of physical and mental illnesses. According to many psychologists, academics, and Buddhist monks, mindfulness exercises all aim to improve a sense of well being and create enduring happiness (Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace 2005). Others claim that the point of mindfulness is to gain an understanding of the true nature of existence (Olendzki, 2010), or to become more mindful and self-aware in daily life (Baer, 2003; Germer, 2005). Similarly, some assert that mindfulness exercises are meant to foster non-judgmental awareness of the present moment (i.e., Baer, 2003). Thus, non-judgmental awareness is considered to be both a component of mindfulness, and an important outcome of mindfulness practice.

While in Western culture mindfulness practices are often used to increase relaxation and reduce stress and suffering, these were not the primary purposes of mindfulness according to Eastern mindfulness traditions (Hamilton et al., 2006). Rather, instead of focusing on taking actions to correct undesirable conditions of the mind and body, mindfulness practices are meant to foster acceptance of these conditions and promote non-judgment, self-awareness, and self-regulation. Also, mindfulness is meant to teach individuals to respond skillfully to distressing emotional conditions and better manage behavior (Bishop et al., 2004). Thus, mindfulness does not primarily aim to "fix" problems, but helps individuals better manage suffering. The increased awareness and regulation in turn often lead to an improvement in mental and physical conditions. This is considered a positive, paradoxical side effect of mindfulness practice.

## Education Part VIII: Support for Mindfulness Practices

Hundreds of scientific journal articles and books exist on the potential usefulness of mindfulness practice (Ryback, 2006; Shigaki et al., 2006). Broadly speaking, research has consistently found mindfulness practices and mindfulness-based therapies to be beneficial to physical (Grossman et al., 2004) and mental health (Baer, 2007; Teasdale et al., 2003). For instance, mindfulness practices can help individuals manage or mitigate the negative effects of high blood pressure and cholesterol levels (Ryback, 2006), psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), fibromyalgia (Grossman et al., 2007; Singh et al., 1998), gastrointestinal disorders (Whitehead, 1992), heart disease (Barnes, Treiber, & Davis, 2001; Tacon et al., 2003), and traumatic brain injury (Bédard et al., 2003; McMillan et al., 2002). Mindfulness techniques have also been found to be useful in helping patients cope with cancer (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Ott, Norris, & Bauer-Wu, 2005; Shigaki et al., 2006) and chronic pain (Randolph et al., 1999). With an improved ability accept current health conditions and practice mindfulness exercises, patients have been reported decreased levels of perceived pain (Dahl & Lundgren, 2006; Plews-Ogan et al., 2005). Moreover, mindfulness has been used in palliative care to help individuals cope better with end-of-life issues (Bruce & Davies, 2005).

Mindfulness research also supports the use of mindfulness techniques with individuals suffering from a variety of mental conditions (Baer, 2003). Results of several studies indicate the usefulness of mindfulness in addressing insomnia (Lundh, 2005; Thomas et al., 2006), anxiety (Hoffmann et al., 2010; Roemer, Orsillo, & Salters-Pedneault, 2008; Semple, Reid, & Miller, 2005), eating disorders (Kristeller, Baer, & Quillian-Wolever, 2006; Tapper et al., 2009), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Bishop et al., 2004), depression (Rokke & Robinson, 2006; Teasdale et al., 2000), substance abuse (Bowen et al., 2006), and borderline personality disorder (Linehan, 1993; Lynch et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2006). Mindfulness exercises are not only useful to individuals suffering from clinical disorders, however; these techniques can enhance the psychological health of healthy individuals (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Chiesa & Serretti, 2009), and they can help improve cognitive functioning (Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007; Slagter et al., 2007).

## **Education Part IX: Evidence for Mindfulness Skills**

Given the hundreds of mindfulness exercises that have been created and promoted, it would be impossible to provide evidence for all of them here. Thus, this section aims to provide evidence for a small number of practices, each of which has gained research support for the management. This Working for Wellness manual utilizes each of these techniques. It is important to present a variety of techniques, since some exercises will resonate more with employees more than others. In addition, while single elements (such as diaphragmatic breathing) have been found to be very beneficial to participants (Caspi & Burlinson, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2005), the practice of multiple techniques is associated with a variety of benefits that may not possible with the practice of just one exercise (Larkey et al., 2009).

### **Breathing Techniques**

One important category of mindfulness exercises is breathing. These techniques are extremely useful in the management of stress because they increase parasympathetic functioning and decrease the functioning of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic system, which triggers and maintains the fight-or-flight response. Breathing techniques stimulate the relaxation branch of the autonomic system (which is the parasympathetic branch) and helps to restore homeostasis when an individual is stressed. Because “the actions of the two parts of the autonomic system are often antagonistic” (Brodal, 2004; p. 369), it is not possible for an individual to be both stressed and relaxed at the same time. Thus, if an individual is able to increase parasympathetic activity, they thereby suppress sympathetic activation. In individuals who are prone to stress, training the parasympathetic system through the acquisition and practice of breathing skills can be very beneficial, since it gives individuals a sense of control over their anxiety.

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

Diaphragmatic breathing, or abdominal breathing, is a type of deep breathing believed to be a healthy alternative to the shallow, chest breathing commonly associated with stress and panic. In diaphragmatic breathing, an individual breathes through their diaphragm (Hazlett-Stevens & Craske, 2009), a muscle located between the chest and abdominal cavities. Diaphragmatic breathing is a widely supported stress management technique (Fried, 1993; Rowe, 1999; Wehrenberg, 2008) that is believed to induce a state of relaxation and reduce autonomic system arousal (Hazlett-Stevens & Craske, 2009). Several studies have shown that this technique reduces self-reported stress (Christakis et al., 2012) and increases individuals’ overall quality of life (Fred, 2000; Hagman et al., 2011). In addition, it has been found to reduce anxiety in a variety of populations, including athletes (Omoluabi, 1994), those with dental anxiety (Biggs, Kelly, & Toney, 2003), lung cancer (Gallo-Silver & Pollack, 2000), Mitral Valve Prolapse Syndrome (Broderick, 1996), panic

disorder (Haxlett-Stevens & Craske, 2009), and anxiety-related illnesses and disorders (Rowe, 1999).

### **Focused Breathing**

Focused breathing is a technique whereby individuals direct their awareness and attention to their breath, and to any sensations that arise during the practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). When individuals' attention wanders from the breath, they are encouraged to gently return their focus to the breath. In this exercise the breath is not typically manipulated; participants are merely instructed to attend to the breath for the duration of the session. However, some practitioners recommend that focused breathing be practiced using the diaphragmatic breathing described in the previous section. Some practitioners also instruct individuals to count their breaths as they breathe, in order to help maintain focus on the breath and reduce stress (through distraction or through other mechanisms not well understood). For instance, square breathing, or boxed breathing, is a type of breath counting technique that is recommended for stress management (Davis et al., 2008).

Research studies have typically incorporated focused breathing into comprehensive CBT approaches, or in conjunction with other mindfulness techniques. Thus, it is difficult to discern the effects of this exercise when used alone. However, research findings have indicated that focused breathing can help individuals regulate emotion. Specifically, those who practice this exercise report decreased negative emotions and less emotional volatility (Arch & Craske, 2006). In addition, focused breathing has been found to help reduce stress, even in an inpatient psychiatric population (Aveni & Cutter, 1977).

### **Ujjayi**

The ujjayi breath is a Taoist pranayamic breathing technique commonly practiced in conjunction with another mindfulness exercises, such as breathing techniques or yoga. While it can be practiced on its own as a type of diaphragmatic, forced expiration breathing, it is usually a type of breathing that enhances the effects of other breathing techniques. To practice ujjayi, individuals are taught to take very slow (2-4 breaths/minute), full, and deep controlled breaths while partially constricting their epiglottis (Telles & Desiraju, 1994). Ujjayi can help an individual to regulate stress (Sharma et al., 2008), build awareness of their breathing, control it, and specifically, to slow it. It can also aid in concentration and the processing of oxygen and carbon dioxide (Biscontini, 2012).

### **Body Scan**

The body scan meditation is a formal practice taught as a component of MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). In this exercise participants close their eyes, lie down, and focus their attention to different parts of their body, one at a time. As Kabat-Zinn (1990) instructs, in

this technique the participant must “maintain awareness in every moment, a detached witnessing of your breath and body, region by region, as you scan from your feet to the top of your head (p. 89). The purpose of the body scan is to teach participants to notice and fully experience any sensations – neutral, painful, or pleasant – that are occurring in their body, without judgment. Moreover, this practice is meant to sharpen individuals’ ability to notice any thoughts or emotions that arise while scanning different parts of the body (Hamilton, Kitzman, & Guyotte, 2006). Ideally, the participant will learn over time not only to notice bodily sensations without judgment, they will also gain an awareness and acceptance of accompanying emotions and thoughts (Teasdale et al., 2000). With this awareness, it becomes easier to shift attention from unhelpful or maladaptive thoughts back to the body (or the breath, if they are completing a breathing exercise). Also, some participants, such as chronic pain patients, may learn over time how to react nonjudgmentally to pain.

The body scan meditation has been found to improve concentration and attention abilities (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Also, this exercise was found to decrease overall stress and anxiety in some HIV patients (Bertucci, 2000). In addition, a study by Ditto, Eclache, and Goldman (2006) revealed that the body scan led to greater increases in cardiac respiratory sinus arrhythmia (CRSA) than did alternative relaxing activities. CRSA is a measure of parasympathetic activity; an increase in CRSA indicates an increase in parasympathetic system activation. Thus, the findings indicate that the participants who practiced the body scan were more relaxed while engaging in this technique than in others (such as listening to an audiotope of an entertaining, relaxing novel). In addition, the results of this study found that women who practiced the body scan exhibited lower blood pressure than those who did not.

### **Mindfulness “Open Awareness” Meditation**

Meditation, broadly defined, is practiced by hundreds of millions of people worldwide, including millions in the U.S. (Walsh, 2011). Mindfulness meditation is the most commonly researched meditation approach, and is growing in popularity in the psychology literature (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In mindfulness meditation, participants first learn to bring their awareness to the breath for several minutes (see the section on Breathing Techniques, especially Focused Breathing, for more information on this technique). After this, participants are taught to shift their focus to sensations in the body, then to sounds and sensations produced by their environment, and then to their emotions and thoughts. Finally, participants are instructed to become mindful of whatever is most salient (whether that experience be in their environment, body, thoughts, emotions, or breathing). This is referred to as “choiceless awareness” (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). When the participant stops attending to the object of focus and their mind begins to wander, they try to recognize this wandering, acknowledge it without judgment, and return to the predominant sensation, object, or experience. The main purposes of mindfulness meditation are to learn how to become open, nonjudgmental, accepting observers of one’s own experiences, and to attend

to these experiences in real-time as they unfold. Another goal, which can be achieved with frequent practice, is for individuals to become mindful observers in their daily lives. Thus, individuals can extend their mindfulness abilities beyond the formal mindfulness meditation practice and become more fully present and accepting of life's ups and downs (Mills & Farrow, 1981). This, in turn can help individuals become "less reactive and more stable" (Kabat-Zinn, 1991, p. 65).

Research has demonstrated that mindfulness practices can be included to address a large array of neural, physiological, biochemical, psychological, and therapeutic issues (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Mindfulness meditation can also be beneficial to individuals suffering from a wide range of psychosomatic, health, and psychological problems (Arias et al., 2006; Black, Milam, & Sussman, 2009; Dusek et al., 2008). Psychosomatic disorders that have been shown to benefit from the practice of mindfulness meditation include cardiovascular hypertension, asthma, chronic pain, hypercholesterolemia, and primary dysmenorrhea (Anderson, Liu, & Kryscio, 2008; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Also, this practice is associated with lowered blood pressure and cortisol levels (Carleson et al., 2007) and improved immune functioning (Davidson et al., 2003).

In addition, mindfulness meditation is often helpful to individuals suffering from a variety of psychological symptoms and disorders, including insomnia, depression, and personality disorders (Didonna, 2009; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Practicing mindfulness meditation has also been shown to enhance some cognitive abilities (Xion & Doraiswamy, 2009), and consistent practice is linked to increased cortical thickness, which can slow the aging process of the brain (Lazar et al., 2005). Moreover, many researchers hypothesize that mindfulness meditation can improve one's ability to empathize with others (i.e., Fulton, 2005; Morgan & Morgan, 2005; Zhapiro & Izett, 2008). Most important for this manual, mindfulness meditation has repeatedly been found to reduce stress (Chiesa & Seretti, 2009; Davidson et al., 2003; Hofmann et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2007), and to mitigate negative emotions overall (Erisman & Roemer, 2010; Jha et al., 2010; Way et al., 2010). Given that it is often effective on its own in reducing stress, it is perhaps not surprising that many clinicians incorporate it into psychotherapy (Grossman et al., 2004).

### **Transcendental "Concentration" Meditation**

In transcendental meditation, participants focus on a sensation, object, sound, or other single stimulus (Delmonte, 1985; Smith, 1975). In this type of meditation it is especially common to focus exclusively on a particular word, or mantra (Baer, 2003). Transcendental meditation is a concentration-based approach to meditation that trains individuals to prevent distracting thoughts from surfacing by restricting their attention to only one stimulus. This, in turn, is meant to help participants reduce their anxiety and maintain a state of relaxation. As in mindfulness meditation, when an individual's attention wanders, they try to notice this and refocus on the stimulus. However, unlike mindfulness meditation, in transcendental meditation there is a designated stimulus to attend to



(Takahashi et al., 2005). In mindfulness meditation one observes and attends to their current, ever-changing experiences (both internal and external), instead of identifying a preset stimulus to which they narrowly attend.

The practice of transcendental meditation is associated with both physical and mental health improvement. For instance, it has been found to reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Anderson, Liu, & Kryscio, 2008; Nidich et al., 2009; Paul-Labrador et al., 2006), and to increase insulin resistance (Paul-Labrador et al., 2006). After examining transcendental meditation's affect on multiple components of coronary heart disease and metabolic syndrome, Paul-Labrador and colleagues (2006) concluded that this type of meditation can modulate individuals' physiological response to stress. In addition, Elder and colleagues' (2011) results revealed a decrease in overall psychological distress and anxiety after regular practice of transcendental meditation. Similarly, Yunesian and colleagues (2008) concluded from their study that transcendental meditation might reduce stress and somatization in young adults. Shortly after this study was published, Nidich and colleagues (2009) completed the first randomized clinical trial on transcendental meditation, and found that the practice of this type of meditation was associated with less psychological distress and improved coping, social well-being, and emotional well-being. Interestingly, a recent study (Rosenthal et al., 2011) concluded that transcendental meditation helped to reduce PTSD symptoms and improve quality of life in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans.

### **Loving Kindness “Compassion” Meditation**

Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM), or Compassion Meditation, involves actively cultivating self-compassion by repeating phrases or expressions of well-wishes and compassion (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010), followed by the cultivation of compassion and love toward others (Wong, 2011) using the same methods. The practice of LKM closely resembles some of the “soothing grounding” exercises described in Najavitz's (2002) *Seeking Safety* manual. According to Najavitz soothing grounding, which often involves repeating kind, compassionate, or soothing statements, helps individuals to distance from emotional pain by turning their focus outward. Similarly, the goals of LKM include extending compassion and love toward all living beings (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010), increasing positive emotions such as kindness, love, and compassion (Weibel, 2008), and decreasing negative emotions such as fear and anger (Carson et al., 2005).

Research supports the theory that LKM fosters positive emotions and reduces negative emotions. For example, LKM has been found to lower anger (Carson et al., 2005, Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011), anxiety (Weibel, 2008), psychological distress (Carson et al., 2005), and depression (Fredrickson, 2008; Wong, 2011). Practicing LKM has also been associated with increased social support, life purpose, and mindfulness (Fredrickson, 2008; Wong, 2011), as well as with increased self-compassion (Weibel, 2008; Wong, 2011), social connectedness (Seppala, 2010), and improved mood (Wong,

2011). Moreover, LKM may help individuals manage pain (Carson et al., 2005). In addition, this type of meditation has been found to increase parasympathetic cardiac control and decrease respiration rate (Law, 2012), and Kemper and Shaltout (2011) found that LKM was associated with improvements in physiologic measures of autonomic activity, indicating an increased sense of well-being. Finally, Hofmann and colleagues (2011) concluded that this type of compassion meditation might improve immune response, reduce stress, and enhance functioning in brain areas involved in empathy and emotion processing.

### **Autogenic Training**

Autogenic training was developed by psychiatrist J.H. Schultz in 1932, and is a type of mindfulness practice in which the meditator focuses on selected proprioceptive sensations (Gonzalez de Riviera, 1997) in order to achieve a state of psychophysiological relaxation (Stetter & Kupper, 2002). According to Schultz, autogenic training improves self-regulatory capacities, and trains individuals to modify the functioning of their autonomic nervous system by repeating a sequence of statements about warm and heavy sensations felt throughout the body.

Autogenics has been found to increase heart rate variability and improve vagal heart control (in other words, reduce sympathetic arousal; Miu, Heilman, & Miclea, 2009), thereby reducing individuals' level of stress. Several researchers have found autogenics to be helpful in the reduction of stress (e.g., Bowden, Lorenc, & Nicola, 2012; Dhiman & Harneet, 2010), as well as the improvement of self-monitoring and self-control (e.g., Shinozaki et al., 2010; Yagi & Sakairi, 2009). Other findings indicate the usefulness of autogenics for those suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (Shinozaki et al., 2010), insomnia, depression, and a variety of health conditions (Bowden et al., 2012).

### **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a mindfulness technique whereby individuals systematically and intentionally tense and release up to 16 major muscle groups, one at a time (McCallie, Blum, & Hood, 2008). This exercise helps individuals learn to recognize the feeling of muscle tension and to release it. The ultimate goal of PMR is to learn to identify, regulate, and release muscle tension, in addition to psychological tension (Manzoni et al., 2008).

PMR has been found to normalize low-frequency heart rate variability, reduce other cardiovascular indices of stress (Green, 2011), increase body temperature (Chen et al., 2009), normalize cortisol levels (Dolbier & Rush, 2012), and reduce depression (Lolack et al., 2008) and anxiety (Chen et al., 2009; Lolack et al., 2008). Studies indicate medium to large effect sizes of PMR for the treatment of generalized anxiety, panic, and other anxiety



disorders (Manzoni et al., 2008). Moreover, PMR has been found to help with tension headaches, chronic pain, insomnia, and irritable bowel syndrome (McCallie et al., 2008).

Each of these techniques is helpful for multiple mental and/or physical health conditions. However, one common finding of all of these techniques, according to the mindfulness literature, is that they have been found to reduce stress. This is critical, since this manual is most concerned with helping employees manage and reduce stress symptoms. While other potentially promising mindfulness techniques exist, the Working for Wellness manual teaches a select set of methods that have empirical support for reducing stress.

## **Education XI: Motivation and the Importance of Practice**

To reap the full benefits of mindfulness practice requires consistent practice. Like the development of any skill, mindfulness exercises require time and effort in order to become skilled at using them. More practice brings more benefits – the more you train in mindfulness practices, the more effective they become. For example, when first learning mindful breathing it may take several minutes to feel relaxed. However, after months of practicing these exercises it may only take you a couple of minutes of practice to turn a stress response into a relaxation response. The good news is that most people who take mindfulness-based courses are able to engage in daily practice outside of class, and many people continue to practice mindfulness skills for years after the course ends. That is our hope for you. Also, keep in mind the following, regarding practice:

- The duration of practice is not as important as the frequency – therefore, practice often even if you don't practice for long.
- Plan your practice ahead of time. Think about when and where practice might be possible, what might get in the way of you practicing, and come up with a contingency plan.
- Practice the skills you like, leave behind the ones you don't. In this manual you'll be introduced to a variety of mindfulness skills, in the hope that one or more of them will work well for you. There's no need to practice all of them all of the time – pick and choose the ones you like and stick with them!

## Education Part XII: How Much Practice is Enough?

### Recommendations:

- Try to engage in a formal mindfulness practice for 20 minutes/day.
- However, what is most important is that you do what you think you WILL do. Some practice is better than none at all, so stick with a practice that you can maintain long-term. Some individuals find it useful to start with a small amount of daily practice (such as 10 minutes/day) and slowly increase that duration over time.
- Remember that practice makes progress. These are skills that you practice to actually alter the functioning of your Autonomic Nervous System. This is definitely possible, but it requires the creation of new habit and, in a sense, *retraining* yourself to stay more relaxed.
- Explore good times during the day to practice, barriers to regular practice, and ideas about how to overcome them.
- Choose between one and three methods that to practice on a regular basis. Find and stick to the methods that work best for you; leave behind those that you do not benefit as much from!

### Good News About Mindfulness Practice:

Despite the demands for daily practice outside sessions, Baer (2003) found that approximately 85% of participants enrolled in mindfulness programs complete them. Thus, mindfulness exercises are not only beneficial for a number of physical and mental conditions, they are also of interest to many people (Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003). Moreover, many mindfulness program completers have been found to continue practicing the techniques for at least three years afterward (Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995). Not surprisingly, mindfulness is a central theme in several therapies that have been created over the past few decades (i.e., Kabat-Zinn, 1992; Linehan, 1993). These therapies are discussed in the next section.

## Caveat

While each of these techniques is used in the context of psychotherapy interventions, it is important to note that the Working for Wellness manual is not meant to be a therapy intervention, and the utilization of these skills do not constitute therapy. ***If an employee may be suffering from a mental disorder, if they are in severe distress, or if they have thoughts of harming themselves, refer them to the organization's EAP or to the nearest emergency room for professional help.*** The techniques described in this manual are best utilized in the context of organizational stress management programs, and the providers of these techniques need not be mental health professionals. However, it is desirable that providers complete adequate training, consultation, and practice before they train employees in these methods.

## **WORKING FOR WELLNESS SKILLS TRAINING**

# Stress Management Skill I: Diaphragmatic Breathing

## Breathing Techniques

One important category of mindfulness exercises is mindful breathing. These techniques are extremely useful in the management of anxiety and stress because they increase parasympathetic functioning, which induces the relaxation response, while decreasing the functioning of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic system, which triggers the fight-or-flight response. Thus, breathing helps to reduce our stress level and increase our level of relaxation. In individuals who are prone to stress, training the parasympathetic (relaxation) system through the practice of breathing skills can be very beneficial, since it gives individuals a sense of control over their stress. Also, breathing exercises are great because your breath is always with you, so you can do these exercises anywhere, anytime!

To begin, let's learn some breathing strategies. You may be saying to yourself, "But I already know how to breathe, I've been doing it all my life." However, there are different ways to breathe. Have you ever noticed what happens to your breath when you become upset, scared, or anxious? It becomes shallow and fast. This can help induce the fight or flight response. However, when you breathe more deeply and slowly, you can begin to induce the relaxation response, which is what we want. In order to breathe deeply and slowly, it's best to use diaphragmatic breathing.

### What is Diaphragmatic Breathing?:

Diaphragmatic breathing, or abdominal breathing, is a type of deep breathing believed to be a healthy alternative to the shallow, chest breathing commonly associated with anxiety and panic. In diaphragmatic breathing, an individual breathes through their diaphragm, a muscle located between the chest and abdominal cavities. Diaphragmatic breathing is a widely supported anxiety and stress management technique that is believed to induce a state of relaxation and reduce autonomic system arousal.

### How to Breathe Through the Diaphragm:

To begin, make sure you are sitting in a comfortable position. Place one hand on chest, and one hand on your stomach. Begin to inhale slowly through your nose, allowing your diaphragm to fill with air. The hand is on your stomach is the hand that should move when you inhale. If the hand that is on your chest moves more than the hand that is on your stomach, then you are engaging in shallow "chest breathing," not deep diaphragmatic breathing. The hand that is on your stomach should move outward as you inhale, and then move inward as you exhale and the diaphragm collapses. As you exhale, breathe through your nose, and allow the air to exit your diaphragm slowly. Remember to breathe fully, slowly, and deeply in and out, paying close attention to the movement of the hand that is on your stomach...

### **Practice Diaphragmatic Breathing:**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on chest, and one hand on your stomach.
3. Begin to inhale slowly through your nose, allowing your diaphragm to fill with air. The hand is on your stomach is the hand that should move when you inhale. If the hand that is on your chest moves more than the hand that is on your stomach, then you are engaging in shallow “chest breathing,” not deep diaphragmatic breathing. The hand that is on your stomach should move outward as you inhale, and then move inward as you exhale and the diaphragm collapses.
4. As you exhale, breathe through your nose, and allow the air to exit your diaphragm slowly.
5. Continue diaphragmatic breathing for a few minutes (5-10).
6. Repeat this exercise at least twice per day (practicing 5-10 minutes each time).

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing Tips:**

1. Breathe fully, slowly, and deeply in and out, paying close attention to the movement of the hand that is on your stomach.
2. Remember that this is a skill, for some of you it may be a new way of breathing, and it may take a while to feel natural.
3. If you begin to notice your attention drifting away from your breathing, gently redirect it back to the breath.
4. Practice this type of breathing for short periods of time, multiple times per day. Whenever you notice your breathing, simply attend to it for a few breaths and try to breathe using your diaphragm.
5. This type of exercise can be used at any time, but it can be especially useful if you know you’re about to go into a stressful situation (or even if you’re already in it), in order to remain calm.
6. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.

(Adapted from Davis, M., Eshelman, E., & McKay, M. (2008). *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook: 6th Edition*. New Harbinger Publications, Incorporated: Oakland, CA.)

## Stress Management Skill II: Ujjayi Breath

### What is Ujjayi?

Before learning this technique, it can be helpful for practitioners to review the article by Biscontini (2012), *Every Breath Counts*, which discusses ujjayi breathing.

The ujjayi breath is a breathing technique commonly practiced in conjunction with other mindfulness exercises, such as breathing techniques or yoga. Ujjayi breathing can help an individual to regulate stress, build awareness of their breathing, control it, and specifically, to slow it. This technique can also aid in concentration and the processing of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and it can warm the body by a few degrees when practiced for more than approximately five minutes. While it can be practiced on its own as a type of diaphragmatic breathing, ujjayi is a breathing strategy that, when used with other breathing techniques, enhances the effects of the other techniques.

### Practice the Ujjayi Breathe:

In ujjayi breathing, individuals take very slow (2-4 breaths/minute), full, and deep controlled breaths while partially constricting the epiglottis. This breathing strategy is substantially more difficult than some of the other approaches in this manual, so don't feel discouraged if it does not make a lot of sense in the beginning.

1. Have a tissue next to you in case you need it. In this exercise you breathe strongly out of our nose, so having a tissue on hand is recommended.
2. Begin inhaling and exhaling with your mouth open, just breathing normally for a few breaths. Let's do this together for a couple of breaths...
3. Next, pretend like there is a mirror close to your face, and pretend as though you are trying to fog up this mirror as you exhale. Inhale through your mouth and when you exhale through your mouth, slightly close part of your epiglottis, which will produce an ocean-like sound. Again, pretend you are trying to fog up a mirror. Another way to think about this is to imagine that your windpipe is a garden hose, and you are slightly restricting the amount of water that can come out by putting your thumb over a part of the hose. Likewise, you are slightly constricting your throat as you exhale (specifically, you are constricting your epiglottis) in this exercise. Take a few breaths using this technique.
4. Continue this exercise, except begin to restrict the air entering your lungs as you inhale. In other words, restrict your epiglottis on both the inhale and exhale, not just on the exhale.
5. Now continue to breathe in this slightly restricted manor, but try it with your mouth closed. You should continue to hear an ocean-like sound as you breathe in and out of your nose. This should now sound similar to a person who is very softly snoring



while sleeping, or kind of like Darth Vader breathing. If you can do this, you are now practicing ujjayi.

6. To get the full benefit of ujjayi, focus on slowing and deepening your breaths as you practice ujjayi. Practice for approximately five minutes, and remember to breathe through your diaphragm. Let's practice now together...

### **Ujjayi Breathing Tips:**

1. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.
2. Remember that the ujjayi breath can be used with other mindful breathing exercises, and other mindfulness practices in general. Because this breathing strategy allows you more control over the speed of your breath, it can be very useful when you want to slow your breathing.
3. Also the constricted airflow of the ujjayi breath produces a very strong, powerful breath, much like water flowing through a hose that is partially constricted. Thus, this exercise is ideal when you want to produce such an intense breath.

(Adapted by Biscontini, L. (2012). Every breath counts. *American Fitness*, 30(2), pp.12-14; Pizer, A. (2009). Ocean breath – Ujjayi pranayama. *About.com Guide*. Retrieved on 8/21/12 from <http://yoga.about.com/od/breathing/a/ujjayi.htm>)

## **Stress Management Skill III.a: Focused Breathing**

### **What is Focused Breathing?**

Focused breathing builds on diaphragmatic breathing. In this exercise, participants practice diaphragmatic breathing, but instead of focusing on the technique of that exercise they attend to the sensations of the breath.

Focused breathing is a technique whereby individuals direct their awareness and attention to their breath, and to any sensations that arise during the practice. It can be practiced in conjunction with diaphragmatic breathing, once you have learned and practiced that breathing strategy enough that it feels natural. Research findings have indicated that focused breathing can help individuals regulate emotion and reduce negative emotions. In addition, focused breathing has been found to help reduce stress, even in individuals with severe stress.

### **How to Do Focused Breathing:**

In focused breathing you simply attend to the breath, and when your attention wanders from the breath, you try to recognize it and gently return your focus to the breath. In this exercise the breath is not typically manipulated (other than breathing through your diaphragm); you merely attend to the breath for the duration of the session. However, some practitioners also instruct individuals to count their breaths as they breathe, in order to help maintain focus on the breath and reduce anxiety (through distraction or through other mechanisms not well understood). If you want to try breath counting, simply count each exhale, starting with 1, 2, etc. If you prefer not to count the breath but are confused about how to focus on the breath, try one of the following during this exercise:

1. Notice what it feels like to inhale and exhale.
2. Notice the temperature of the air as you inhale and exhale.
3. Notice whether your breaths are deep or shallow, fast or slow.
4. Notice how your abdomen rises with each inhale, and falls with each exhale.

### **Practice Focused Breathing:**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Begin to practice diaphragmatic breathing but instead of focusing on that technique, simply focus on the sensations of the breath. Notice what it is like to inhale and exhale. Note what the air feels like as you inhale – is it cool or warm? What does it feel like as you exhale? Notice your breathing – is it shallow or deep, fast or slow? Notice how your abdomen rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale.
3. Continue to focus on the breath, noticing its qualities.

4. When your mind wanders from the breath, acknowledge the fact that it has wandered, congratulate yourself on this awareness, and gently redirect your attention back to the breath.
5. Continue focused breathing for a few minutes (2-5).
6. If you wish to count your breaths, count beginning at 1, 2, etc., on each exhale. If your mind wanders, refocus on the breath and begin the breath counting again at 1.

**Focused Breathing Tips:**

1. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.
2. It is recommended that you practice this type of breathing for short periods of time, multiple times per day. Remember to try to practice it in conjunction with diaphragmatic breathing.
3. When you practice this exercise, you will likely find that your mind wanders from the breath. When this happens, acknowledge that your mind has wandered and gently redirect your attention to the breath.
4. This type of exercise can be used at any time, but it can be especially useful if you know you're about to go into a stressful situation (or even if you're already in it), in order to remain calm.

(Adapted by Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.)

## Stress Management Skill III.b: Square Breathing

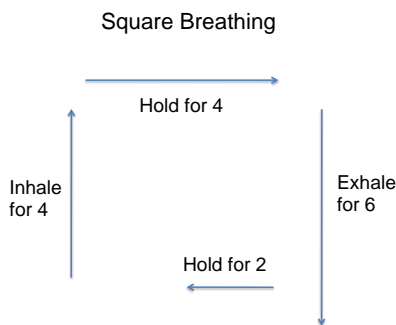
### What is Square Breathing?

Focused breathing, as discussed in the previous section, is a technique where you direct your awareness and attention to your breath. The square breathing, or boxed breathing exercise, is a particular type of focused breathing in which participants count their inhales and exhales. This breathing method can help individuals cope more effectively with stressful situations and challenging emotional upsets and, like all breathing exercises, you can practice it anywhere, anytime.

### How to Do Square Breathing:

To do the square breath, we are going to follow a simple set of directions. First, begin to inhale, slowly and deeply using diaphragmatic breathing (and ujjayi breathing as well if you prefer). As you inhale, begin counting, and inhale until the count of four. Next, hold your breath for a count of four, counting at the same pace as you did during your inhale. Now begin to exhale slowly and fully, for a count of six, and then hold your breath for a count of two. These are the steps we complete with each breath.

Here is a visual representation of the square breath:



### Practice Square Breathing:

1. Get into a comfortable position in your chair and slowly shift your attention to the breath, breathing normally.
2. Continue breathing, focusing on breathing through your diaphragm, inhaling fully, and exhaling fully. Begin ujjayi breathing as well if you prefer.
3. To begin the square breath, inhale slowly and fully. Inhale for a count of four.
4. Hold your breath for a count of four, counting at the same pace.
5. Begin to exhale slowly and fully, for a count of six.

6. Hold your breath for a count of two. Again, keep the same counting pace throughout the exercise.
7. Repeat steps 1-6.

**Square Breathing Tips:**

1. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.
2. It is recommended that this technique be incorporated into everyday life, whenever it crosses your mind to practice it. It can be good to practice between tasks, during a break, or when you feel yourself becoming stressed out.
3. While all components of this exercise are important, the exhale is particularly important. This is why the exhale is two counts longer than the inhale. When we exhale, we rid our body of carbon dioxide, which is toxic to our body if not exhaled.
4. The entire exercise can take as long as you would like it to, but approximately 15-30 minutes is recommended.

## Stress Management Skill IV: Body Scan

### What is the Body Scan?

In this exercise participants focus their attention to different parts of their body, one at a time. The purpose of the body scan is to teach participants to notice and fully experience any sensations – neutral, painful, or pleasant – that are occurring in their body in their body, without judgment. Moreover, this practice is meant to sharpen individuals' ability to notice any thoughts or emotions that arise while scanning different parts of the body. Ideally, the participant will learn over time not only to notice bodily sensations without judgment, they will also gain an awareness and acceptance of accompanying emotions and thoughts. The body scan meditation has been found to improve concentration and attention abilities. Also, this exercise has been found to decrease overall stress and anxiety.

### How to Do the Body Scan:

In the body scan, participants draw their attention to different regions of the body, one at a time. Which particular regions an individual focuses on depends on personal preference, but it is recommended that most the following areas be scanned in this exercise:

- Feet
- Lower legs
- Upper legs
- Buttocks/hips/pelvic area (any or all of these areas)
- Abdomen
- Lower and/or upper back, or entire back
- Arms
- Hands
- Chest area (with a repeated focus on the breath)
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Head

### Practice the Body Scan:

1. Begin by focusing your attention on your breath, engaging in focused breathing but not manipulating your breath. Notice what it feels like as you breathe in, and as you breathe out.
2. And now extend your focus to your entire body, the way you do during a mindful check-in, just noticing any sensations that arise in your body. Notice these sensations without judgment.
3. Now prepare to begin the body scan. As you go through this exercise, you may

notice various sensations. When this happens, simply experience and accept the sensations, as well as any accompanying thoughts or emotions you may have.

4. To begin the body scan, shift your focus to the soles of your feet, just noticing any sensations that may arise as you attend to this area. Feel into the soles of your feet, without judgment, noticing what the heels, balls, and arches of your feet feel like. Stay here for a moment.
5. Now gently shift your awareness to your toes, and the top of your feet, noticing what this area feels like, without judgment. Notice any sensations that are present in your toes or the top of your feet. Stay here for a moment.
6. Let awareness begin to shift upward to the lower part of the legs, above the feet but below the knees. Notice the sensations occurring in your calf muscles, and in the front areas of your legs. Just feel into these areas with a calm awareness. Stay here for a moment.
7. Withdraw your attention from your lower legs, and begin focusing on the upper parts of your legs, above your knees but below your hips, noticing what your hamstrings and quads feel like. Become a non-judgmental observer of these areas, simply accepting any sensations that may be present. Stay here for a moment.
8. Continue with this exercise, scanning the major areas of the entire body. The particular areas you choose to focus on depends on personal preference, but it is recommended that most the following areas be scanned in this exercise:
  - Feet
  - Lower legs
  - Upper legs
  - Buttocks/hips/pelvic area (any or all of these areas)
  - Abdomen
  - Lower and/or upper back, or entire back
  - Arms
  - Hands
  - Chest area
  - Shoulders
  - Neck
  - Head

### **Body Scan Tips:**

1. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.
2. It is recommended that this technique be practiced for 15-30 minutes.
3. An alternative way to practice the body scan is to not only attend to each area of the body, but to also imagine that you are breathing into each area. For instance,

while attending to the sensations in your feet, you can imagine that you are breathing into your feet during exhales.

(Adapted from Davis, M., Eshelman, E., & McKay, M. (2008). *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook: 6th Edition*. New Harbinger Publications, Incorporated: Oakland, CA; Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: Oakland, CA.)



## Stress Management Skill V: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

### What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)?

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense, but perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw feels tight, or maybe your shoulders become tense. One method of reducing muscle tension is by practicing a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In PMR, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them.

PMR is a mindfulness technique whereby individuals tense and release their major muscle groups, one at a time. This exercise helps you learn to recognize the feeling of muscle tension, and then to release it. The ultimate goal of PMR is to learn to identify, regulate, and release muscle tension, as well as psychological tension. By intentionally tensing our muscles and noticing what it feels like, we can become more aware of when we are stressed out and tensing our muscles. It can be an early sign of stress to pay attention to! PMR has been found to reduce stress and anxiety, and has been used in the treatment of generalized anxiety, panic, and other anxiety disorders. Also, PMR has been found to help with tension headaches, chronic pain, and insomnia.

### How to Do PMR:

You will likely find this exercise to be straightforward, as it is very similar to the body scan. The main difference between the body scan and PMR is that in PMR you tense will and relax muscle groups for approximately 10 seconds at a time as you scan the body, instead of simply attending to these regions. When you squeeze each area of the body, aim to tense your muscles at approximately 50% of the hardest you think you could squeeze. Do not squeeze each muscle group as hard as you can. Also, if a particular area is painful, squeeze only at 10% or so, or not at all if any tension is painful. After tensing a muscle for 10 seconds, be sure to follow this with at least 20 seconds of relaxation in that area. Below is a recommended relaxation sequence to follow, and included are suggestions for how to tense different regions of the body as you practice PMR.

#### Relaxation sequence

1. Right hand and forearm. Make a fist with your right hand.
2. Right upper arm. Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. Left hand and forearm.
4. Left upper arm.
5. Forehead. Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you are surprised.
6. Eyes and cheeks. Squeeze your eyes tight shut.

7. Mouth and jaw. Open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning.
8. Neck. Face forward and pull your head back, as though you are looking at the ceiling.
9. Shoulders. Tense the muscles in your shoulders by bringing them up towards your ears.
10. Shoulder blades/Back. Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. Chest and stomach. Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. Hips and buttocks. Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. Right upper leg. Tighten your right thigh.
14. Right lower leg. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. Right foot. Curl your toes downwards.
16. Left upper leg. Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. Left lower leg. Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. Left foot. Repeat as for right foot.

**Practice PMR:**

1. Close your eyes or find a point on the floor to focus on, and gently shift your focus to the breath, just noticing what it feels like to breathe in and out... Noticing the quality of the breath...
2. Now extend your awareness to your entire body, as you would in a mindful check-in. As you attend to any sensations arising in your body, make note of any tension you may be experiencing in your body. However, do not try to change this tension right now, just be aware of it, without judgment.
3. Now let's shift our awareness to our left foot, in a similar way as we did in the body scan. With full focus on your left foot, now squeeze the muscles in your foot, squeezing them at approximately 50% intensity. Keep squeezing, hold it, until I tell you to release the tension. ... Now relax your foot. Relax it completely, noticing what it feels like to be relaxed after having been tense. Just attend to the sensation of relaxation. If there is remaining tension that you cannot seem to relax, simply attend to the tension without judgment.
4. Next, your awareness to your right foot. With full focus on your right foot, squeeze the muscles in your foot, again squeezing them at approximately 50% intensity. Keep squeezing, hold it, until I tell you to release the tension. Attend to that tightness, be aware of what tension feels like... Now relax your right foot, noticing the sensations of relaxation. Note the difference between feeling tense, and feeling relaxed.
5. Continue progressing through the major areas of the entire body. Which particular areas you focus on depends on personal preference, but it is recommended that most the following areas be scanned in this exercise:
  - Feet
  - Lower legs
  - Upper legs

- Buttocks/hips/pelvic area (any or all of these areas)
- Abdomen
- Lower and/or upper back, or entire back
- Arms
- Hands
- Chest area (with a repeated focus on the breath)
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Head

### **PMR Tips**

1. If possible, complete this exercise sitting in a chair or lying down when you're at home.
2. It is recommended that this technique be practiced for 15-30 minutes.
3. If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.
4. Practice means progress. Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practicing consistently is the key.
5. If you want to intensify your practice, you may consider doing progressive muscle relaxation two times in one setting.
6. The most important thing is to scan the major body/muscle groups, but the order is not so important, nor is it crucial to attend to every single small area.

(Adapted with permission from Centre for Clinical Interventions' progressive muscle relaxation handout, retrieved from <http://www.psychologytools.org/relaxation.html>)

## Stress Management Skill VI: Autogenic Relaxation

### What is Autogenic Relaxation?

Autogenic training is a type of mindfulness practice in which the meditator focuses on selected sensations in the body in order to achieve a state deep relaxation. According to the creator of autogenic training, this technique helps individuals learn to reverse the stress response (fight or flight response), and induce the relaxation response. This is done by repeating a sequence of statements about warm and heavy sensations in the body. This is an important part of autogenic training, because what we tell ourselves influences what we feel. Autogenics has been found to reduce stress and anxiety, and to increase self-control. It has also been shown to be helpful for those suffering from insomnia, depression, and a variety of health conditions. It has even been used with NASA astronauts, to help them learn to control and reduce the feeling nausea when they're in space.

Autogenics shares some common traits with yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, and hypnosis. Specifically, the relaxation hypnotized individuals experience is related to two factors – the warmth, and the heaviness they experience. These are the two sensations we are going to focus on in this exercise. However, this is not hypnosis, and you will not be hypnotized.

### Practice Autogenic Training:

1. To begin, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, sit with your back straight and your hands on your lap, and close your eyes if you are comfortable.
2. Begin to draw your attention to the breath, and engage in focused, diaphragmatic breathing (and ujjayi breathing, if you would like to) for a few moments.
3. Now repeat after me, to yourself: I am completely calm.
4. Shift your focus to your arms. Repeat after me, to yourself:
  - a. My arms are heavy
  - b. My arms are heavy
  - c. My arms are heavy
  - d. My arms are very heavy
  - e. My arms are very heavy
  - f. My arms are very heavy
  - g. I am completely calm.
5. Refocus your awareness your arms. Repeat after me, to yourself:
  - a. My arms are warm
  - b. My arms are warm
  - c. My arms are warm
  - d. My arms are very warm
  - e. My arms are very warm

- f. My arms are very warm
  - g. I am completely calm.
6. Shift your focus to your legs. Repeat after me, to yourself:
- a. My legs are heavy
  - b. My legs are heavy
  - c. My legs are heavy
  - d. My legs are very heavy
  - e. My legs are very heavy
  - f. My legs are very heavy
  - g. I am completely calm.
7. Refocus your awareness to your legs. Repeat after me, to yourself:
- a. My legs are warm
  - b. My legs are warm
  - c. My legs are warm
  - d. My legs are very warm
  - e. My legs are very warm
  - f. My legs are very warm
  - g. I am completely calm.
8. Shift your focus to your beating heart. Repeat after me, to yourself:
- a. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - b. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - c. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - d. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - e. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - f. My heartbeat is calm and slow
  - g. I am completely calm.
9. Shift your focus to the breath. Repeat after me, to yourself:
- a. My breath is calm and steady
  - b. My breath is calm and steady
  - c. My breath is calm and steady
  - d. My breath is calm and steady
  - e. My breath is calm and steady
  - f. My breath is calm and steady
  - g. I am completely calm.
10. Shift your focus to your stomach area. Repeat after me, to yourself:
- a. My stomach is soft and warm
  - b. My stomach is soft and warm
  - c. My stomach is soft and warm
  - d. My stomach is soft and warm
  - e. My stomach is soft and warm
  - f. My stomach is soft and warm
  - g. I am completely calm.
11. Shift your focus to your forehead. Repeat after me, to yourself:

- a. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - b. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - c. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - d. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - e. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - f. My forehead is cool and relaxed
  - g. I am completely calm.
12. Now shift your attention back to the breath for a moment, practicing focused, diaphragmatic breathing.
  13. To end this practice, first simply enjoy the feeling of relaxation, and notice any feelings of heaviness or warmth in your body.
  14. Slowly re-enter the room.

### **Autogenic Training Tips:**

1. It is recommended that you practice this meditation multiple times per day for short periods of time (5-10 minutes). If possible, try to practice 2-3 times per day.
2. It is best to practice in a quiet space or room, without distractions.
3. You may complete this exercise while sitting or lying down. If you are seated in a chair, try to straighten your back as you practice, with your feet flat on the floor.
4. If you suffer from heart disease or high blood pressure, use caution in practicing this exercise and speak with you physician before engaging in autonomic training.

(Adapted from: Cuncic, A. (2012). How to practice autogenic training. Retrieved September 10, 2012, from <http://socialanxietydisorder.about.com/od/copingwithsad/qt/autogenic.htm>; Richmond, R. L. (2008). Other applications of psychology. Retrieved September 11, 2012, from <http://www.guidetopsychology.com/othapp.htm>)

## **Stress Management Skill VII: Mindful Check-In**

### **What is the Mindful Check-In?**

The mindful check-in only takes three minutes and can be done anytime, anywhere during your day. The point of the mindful check-in is to increase self-awareness by stopping to “check in” with ourselves. We check in with ourselves to become aware of how we are feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically. Sometimes we begin to experience thoughts, feelings, or sensations without really knowing it, and we can be unaware of these experiences until they become overwhelming. In order to manage stress, we have to know when and how we feel stressed, and be able to detect it early, before it builds in intensity. That way we can address it before it gets damaging. Frequent check-ins with ourselves can help us become more aware of the faint (or not-so-faint) presence of stress.

### **How to Do the Mindful Check-In:**

In this exercise we are simply going to “check in” with any experience occurring in our bodies (such as sensations, tension, or relaxation), minds (such as thoughts), or emotions (such different types and intensities of emotions). First, you will check in with your body, just noticing any experience or sensation that might be present. Next, you will check in with your emotions, noticing any emotional experience that might be present. If you do not experience any identifiable emotion, that is okay. Finally, you will check in with your mind, noticing any thoughts entering, flowing through, or exiting your mind. During this exercise it is important to be a scientist and not a judge; there is no unacceptable thought, feeling, or sensation. The goal is to simply be present and notice what is there, hiding nothing from ourselves.

### **Practice the Mindful Check-In:**

1. To begin, close your eyes, or find a spot on the floor to stare at.
2. Begin the mindful check-in by attending to your breath. Notice its qualities, what it feels like. Breathe in, and breathe out, noticing how your abdomen rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale. Engage in this focused breathing for a moment.
3. Now extend this awareness of the breath to your entire body, just being present with your whole body and noticing any sensations that arise. Do not judge these sensations, just notice anything happening in your body. Maybe you feel some relaxation in some area, or some tension. Maybe there is some discomfort, or another particular sensation. Just be with these experiences for a moment.
4. Now shift your attention to your emotions, and any feelings you may be having, no matter how subtle or strong. Again, do not want to judge these emotions, simply notice and accept their presence. Stay with your emotions for a moment.
5. Finally, shift you awareness to your thoughts. Without becoming attached to any of your thoughts, or getting wrapped up in them, simply notice them. Notice them as

- they arrive, observe them as they play out, and allow them to leave without trying to push them away or cling to them. Stay with your thoughts for a moment.
6. When you are ready, slowly and gently open your eyes and re-enter the room.

**Mindful Check-In Tips:**

1. The entire exercise should only take approximately three minutes, as it is meant to be a short formal practice.
2. If you feel comfortable with closing your eyes during this practice, this is recommended. If not, find a place on the floor to gently focus your eyes on.
3. It is recommended that this technique be incorporated into everyday life, whenever it crosses your mind to practice it. It can be good to practice between tasks, during a break, or when you feel yourself becoming stressed out.

(Adapted by Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: Oakland, CA.)



## Stress Management Skill VIII: Open Awareness Meditation

### What is Open Awareness Meditation?

Open Awareness (or “Mindfulness”) Meditation is the most commonly researched meditation approach, and is growing in popularity. The main purpose of open awareness meditation is to learn how to become open, nonjudgmental, accepting observers of one’s own experiences. Another goal, which can be achieved with frequent practice, is for individuals to become mindful observers in their daily lives.

There is an abundance of evidence in support of open awareness meditation. In fact, meditation research has accumulated more support than any other psychotherapeutic technique or method for addressing a large array of neural, physiological, biochemical, psychological, and therapeutic effects. Psychosomatic disorders that have been shown to benefit from the practice of mindfulness meditation include cardiovascular hypertension, asthma, and chronic pain. Also, mindfulness meditation is associated with lowered blood pressure and improved immune functioning. In addition, mindfulness meditation is often helpful to individuals suffering from a variety of psychological symptoms and disorders, including insomnia, depression, stress, and anxiety.

### How to Do Open Awareness Meditation:

In open awareness meditation, participants become open to experiencing anything that is happening in their bodies, minds, emotions, and external environment, without judgment. All thoughts, feelings, sensations, smells, sounds, and experiences become part of the meditation, and the person simply pays attention to any and all of these things that occur. Similar to the mindful check-in, open awareness meditation encourages participants to be open and receptive to any experience that might arise. In fact, open awareness meditation is a lot like the mindful check-in, except that it instructs individuals to be open to experiences of the mind, body, and emotions *all at the same time*, instead of paying attention to these domains separately.

### Practice Open Awareness Meditation:

1. Sit with your back straight and your hands on your lap. Close your eyes or find a point on the floor to focus on, and gently shift your focus to the breath, noticing the quality of the breath...Remember to practice diaphragmatic breathing, and ujjayi if you would like... Continue mindful breathing for a few moments.
2. If you find that your attention has wandered from the breath, congratulate yourself on this awareness, disengage from that thought, and return your focus to the breath.
3. Expand your awareness from the breath to the entire body, focusing on any sensations that arise. Notice any tension, and any relaxation you feel. Don’t try to change these sensations or judge them, simply notice and accept them. Be with

- your body for a few moments and, if you'd prefer, you can scan your body for sensations as you would in a body scan. Continue this exercise for a few moments.
4. Shift your attention to your mind. Pay attention to any thoughts or emotions that may be present, and be with them as they appear, pass through, and disappear from your mind. Resist the temptation to analyze them. Remember, these are just thoughts, or just emotions, they do not have to overwhelm you. Continue this exercise for a few moments.
  5. Next, expand awareness again by opening your attention to the environment. Notice the sounds in the room, the temperature, the light coming through your eyelids, and anything you can sense in the room. If your attention wanders away from your environment, gently redirect your awareness back to the environment, with a gentle curiosity. Continue this exercise for a few moments.
  6. Combine all of the techniques, opening your awareness to anything that catches your attention. It may be an emotion, or a sound, or a sensation, or a series of thoughts. Whatever comes to you now, simply focus on it. There are no such things as distractions now – everything that enters your consciousness becomes an object of meditation, no matter what it is. Simply follow whatever comes to you, being present with it without judgment, and without attempting to alter it. Just be with yourself now. Continue this exercise for several minutes.
  7. If your focus has wandered from whatever experience you are having, gently remind yourself to continue to be present with all sensations, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Continue to be with yourself, wholly.
  8. Now, with your eyes still closed, begin to shift your focus back to the breath for a moment and, when you are ready, slowly begin to open your eyes.

### **Open Awareness Meditation Tips:**

1. It is recommended that you practice this meditation multiple times per day for short periods of time (such as 5-10 minutes), or once per day for approximately 20 minutes.
2. It is best to practice in a quiet space or room, without distractions.
3. You may complete this exercise while sitting or lying down. If you are seated in a chair, try to straighten your back as you practice, with your feet flat on the floor.
4. If possible, try to begin forming a habit of redirecting your awareness back to the exercise when it wanders.

## Stress Management Skill IX: Concentration Meditation

### What is Concentration Meditation?

In concentration meditation you focus on one particular sensation, object, sound, or word (also called a “mantra”). Concentration meditation trains individuals to prevent distracting, racing thoughts from surfacing by restricting their attention to only one stimulus. This, in turn, helps to reduce anxiety. The practice of concentration meditation is associated with both physical and mental health improvement. For instance, it has been found to reduce blood pressure, anxiety, and stress. It has also been found to improve people’s coping, social well-being, and emotional well-being.

### How to Do Concentration Meditation:

As with open awareness meditation, when you notice that your attention has wandered, you will try to notice this and refocus on the stimulus. However, unlike open awareness meditation, in concentration meditation there is a designated stimulus (meaning, just one sound, sensation, thought, word, etc.) to attend to. While in open awareness meditation you pay attention to your current, ever-changing experiences, in concentration meditation you will instead focus on one particular stimulus/experience. So think of open awareness meditation as keeping an open, unfocused awareness of everything, and think of concentration meditation as maintaining a sharp focus on just one thing.

Before beginning concentration meditation, it is recommended that you first think about and choose the one stimulus you choose a mantra. This is important because, again, the main purpose of concentration meditation is to focus repeatedly on *just one thing*. This one thing can be anything, but a lot of people find it helpful for the stimulus to be a word or short phrase that they repeat, also called a mantra. But a mantra isn’t just any word or phrase; it is meaningful to you personally. Oftentimes, participants choose a mantra that is soothing, inspirational, motivating, positive, or even spiritual. You can choose any word or phrase as your mantra, but here are some examples to get you thinking about what might work for you:

- Calm
- Peace
- Breathe
- I am strong
- I can do this
- This will pass

Take a moment to think about a word or phrase which you will silently repeat during this meditation.

### **Practice Concentration Meditation:**

1. First choose a mantra that you will repeat during this meditation.
2. Sit with your back straight and your hands on your lap. Close your eyes or find a point on the floor to focus on, and gently shift your focus to the breath, just noticing what it feels like to breathe in and out... Noticing the quality of the breath.
3. Silently or using a very quiet whisper, state your mantra to yourself. Repeat the mantra over and over. Repeat the mantra continuously for one minute.
4. Take a break from the mantra and focus back on the breath for another minute or so. As you focus on the breath, allow the mantra to come back into your mind, but do not force it.
5. Shift your focus to your mantra, and begin to repeat it again. If another thought enters your awareness, accept its presence but do not focus on it, and return the focus to the mantra. Continue repeating the mantra for approximate three minutes.
6. Continue alternating focused breathing and concentration meditation, completing three additional cycles of one minute of focused breathing and three minutes of concentration meditation.
7. At the end of these cycles, slowly open your eyes and come back into the room.

### **Concentration Meditation Tips:**

1. It is recommended that you practice this meditation multiple times per day for short periods of time (such as 5-10 minutes), or once per day for approximately 20 minutes.
2. It is best to practice in a quiet space or room, without distractions.
3. You may complete this exercise while sitting or lying down. If you are seated in a chair, try to straighten your back as you practice, with your feet flat on the floor.
4. If possible, try to begin forming a habit of redirecting your awareness back to the mantra when your mind wanders from it during concentration meditation.

## Stress Management Skill X: Compassion Meditation

### What is Compassion Meditation?

Compassion meditation (also known as loving kindness meditation) involves actively cultivating compassion by repeating phrases or expressions of well-wishes and compassion. The goals of this type of meditation are to extend compassion toward the self and others. Research has found that compassion meditation increases positive emotions and reduces stress, anger, depression, and anxiety. Also, compassion meditation can help individuals manage chronic pain and improve immune response.

### How to Do Compassion Meditation:

In this exercise we will begin by sending compassionate, positive thoughts toward ourselves. Then, we will extend this self-compassion to an individual we like and care for deeply. After this, we will extend compassionate thoughts to an individual we feel neutral toward, and then to an individual we do not like. Finally, we will extend compassionate intentions out to all people, and every living being.

### Practice Compassion Meditation:

1. With your eyes closed, begin focused, diaphragmatic breathing.
2. Congratulate yourself for being willing to take this time out of your busy day to become a more compassionate person to yourself and others...
3. Take a moment to reflect on yourself and the person you are – your hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses. Reflect on your desire to be healthy, safe, and at peace. As you do this, silently repeat the following to yourself:
  - a. May I be healthy
  - b. May I be safe
  - c. May you be free of suffering
  - d. May I be happy
  - e. May I be at peace
4. Be with these intentions for a few moments...
5. Now think of one person you love, respect, or have other positive emotions toward. They can be anyone from your past or present, or even someone you never knew, such as a religious figure. Visualize this person in your mind, reflecting on what makes them special. Now direct these phrases toward them:
  - a. May you be healthy
  - b. May you be safe
  - c. May you be free of suffering
  - d. May you be happy
  - e. May you be at peace
6. Be with these intentions for a few moments...

7. Now imagine a person in your life that you don't have strong feelings for. A person that you don't dislike, but a person you don't necessarily really like either. It's someone you feel neutral about. Try to get a clear image of them in your head. Direct these phrases toward them:
  - a. May you be healthy
  - b. May you be safe
  - c. May you be free of suffering
  - d. May you be happy
  - e. May you be at peace
8. Be with these intentions for a few moments...
9. Imagine a person that you do not like, someone you have negative feelings toward or someone you have difficulty getting along with. Imagine them in your mind, and reflect on their desire to be free of suffering. Direct these phrases toward them:
  - a. May you be healthy
  - b. May you be safe
  - c. May you be free of suffering
  - d. May you be happy
  - e. May you be at peace
10. Be with these intentions for a few moments...
11. Extend these good intentions to everyone in the world. Try to imagine all of the people in the world living their lives in different places. Consider their desire to be healthy, safe, happy, and at peace. Direct these phrases toward all people:
  - a. May everyone in the world be healthy
  - b. May everyone in the world be safe
  - c. May everyone in the world be free of suffering
  - d. May everyone in the world be happy
  - e. May everyone in the world be at peace
12. Be with these intentions for a few moments...
13. Extending compassion even further, imagine all living beings in the world. Reflect on the universal desire that we all, as living beings, have to live free of suffering, in safety, in health, and in peace. Direct these phrases toward all living things in the universe:
  - a. May all living beings be healthy
  - b. May living beings be safe
  - c. May living beings be free of suffering
  - d. May living beings be happy
  - e. May living beings be at peace
14. Be with these intentions for a few moments...
15. Reflect once more on all living beings with compassion, repeating to yourself a few times: May all living beings be healthy, safe, free of suffering, happy, and at peace.
16. When you are ready, slowly and gently open your eyes.

### **Compassion Meditation Tips:**

1. It is recommended that you practice this meditation for approximately 20 minutes. However, it can be a useful technique to practice even if you only have a few free moments in your day.
2. You may complete this exercise while sitting, lying down, standing, or walking. Thus, you can complete it any time, and in most places.

(Adapted from Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: Oakland, CA.)

## Informal Mindfulness Practice

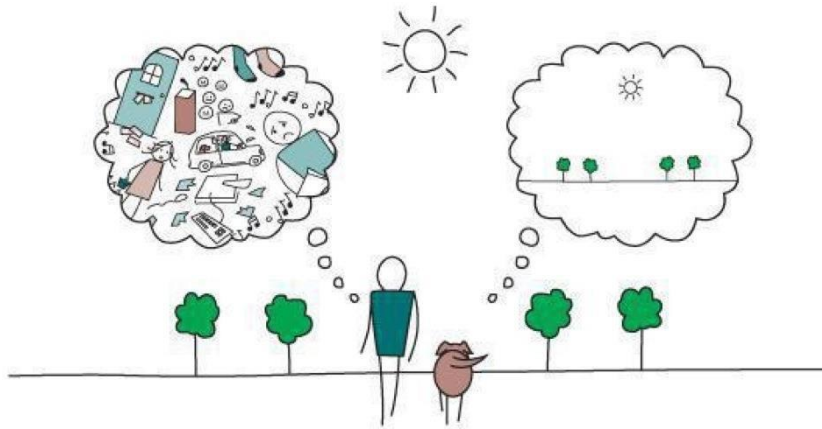
We know it's very helpful to practice mindfulness exercises daily, but the ideal amount of time we should practice isn't clear. In various mindfulness-based interventions, recommendations range from 14-45 minutes per day. Thus, there is no established ideal practice length. What seems to be most important is that you engage in some type of mindfulness practice every day. There are a variety of ways to do this, including using formal and informal mindfulness practices. The techniques presented in this manual fall in the category of "formal mindfulness" – in these exercises we are taking time out of our day, sitting down, and focusing on a particular mindfulness practice. In order to do this, we disengage from our lives for a planned, structured session of mindfulness. But there is another way to practice mindfulness that is a little bit different, which can be helpful if you are having difficulty setting aside time every day to formally practice mindfulness techniques.

This other practice method is called "informal mindfulness practice." In informal mindfulness practice you bring mindfulness to your normal, everyday life as you engage in day-to-day activities. This type of mindfulness practice is more spontaneous and unplanned than formal practice. Examples include mindful walking, mindful eating, mindful listening, or mindful driving. For example, you may intentionally observe the scenes, sounds, smells, and sensations that you're experiencing as you walk, instead of going on "auto pilot" and thinking of other things.

The "Mind Full and Mindful" picture below is a good example of what I mean. You see a person walking his dog, which is might be a necessary, mundane daily chore. He has his "mind full" of thoughts. The person isn't really in the present moment – rather, he's caught up in rehearsing the past, obsessing about the future, going over his to-do list, etc. He's not really here, and he's missing out on the beautiful day that the dog is enjoying. The dog, on the other hand, is simply experiencing the walk as it is. Animals are particularly good at living in the moment and savoring experiences, so we can learn a lot from them when it comes to "smelling the roses."

Of course, mindful walking can also be a formal mindfulness practice if we take time out in order to walk and be mindful, but we don't necessarily have to make it formal – we can walk mindfully to and from our cars, while walking the dog, etc. In fact, informal mindfulness practice is important because it helps us to generalize the formal practices into our daily lives. Ideally, mindfulness practice can eventually become so integrated into our daily functioning that we remain mindful at all times, thereby practicing mindfulness during all daily activities. One can begin to accomplish this goal by engaging in both formal and informal mindfulness practice.





## Mind Full, or Mindful?

Keep in mind that many of the mindfulness practices we've learned in here can be practiced both formally and informally, including all of the breathing exercises, the mindful check-in, and the body scan. The meditations are less conducive to informal practice, but can be practiced for short periods of time if needed.

## Creating a Personalized Mindfulness Plan

If you look at the mindfulness plan handout, you'll see a series of questions that can help you think about your own personal mindfulness plan.

Mindfulness techniques I would like to continue to formally practice:  
(Circle the techniques that you would like to practice on a regular basis.)

1. Mindful check-in
  2. Diaphragmatic Breathing
  3. Focused Breathing (including Square Breathing)
  4. Ujjayi Breathing
  5. Body Scan
  6. Mindful (Open) Meditation
  7. Concentration Meditation
  8. Loving Kindness Meditation
  9. Autogenic Training
  10. Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  11. Other formal practices (yoga, tai chi, etc.)
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Mindfulness techniques I would like to continue to practice informally:  
(Circle the techniques that you would like to practice on a regular basis.)

1. Mindful check-in
2. Diaphragmatic Breathing
3. Focused Breathing (including Square Breathing)
4. Ujjayi Breathing
5. Body Scan
6. Mindful (Open) Meditation
7. Other informal practices (such as mindful walking, eating, listening, etc.)

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Times of day I can formally practice mindfulness techniques:

Here are a few ideas of times that work for some people:

- First thing in the morning
- Last thing at night
- During lunch break
- Before picking up the kids from school
- Right before/after dinner
- During breaks at work
- Right before/after exercising
- Right before/after a regularly-scheduled appointment

Times that would work for me:

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Things that might get in the way of me practicing, and some possible solutions:

Here are a few examples:

- Problem: *“My schedule has changed and my practice time doesn’t work...”*
  - Possible solution: Examine your new schedule and try to find a time that would work better for you. If you cannot find much time in your schedule, try to schedule a very small amount of time for mindfulness practice, even if it is just for a few minutes. Something is much better than nothing!
- Problem: *“I’ve been busy dealing with illness (mine or someone else’s)...”*
  - Possible solution: Remember that although it can be difficult to remember to practice mindfulness skills during hectic, stressful, and exhausting times, it can also be extremely helpful. These exercises can calm and balance you, reduce your anxiety, and help you to cope more effectively with stressors.
- Problem: *“I lost the mindfulness materials and can’t remember the exercises...”*
  - Possible solution: Contact one of the Health Coaches for another copy of this manual.
- Problem: *“I’m feeling pretty good and am not under much stress...”*
  - Possible solution: Keep in mind that mindfulness exercises aren’t just to be practiced when something is wrong – they’re very good for stress prevention, not just stress reduction. When you practice during easy/good

times, you continue to build mindfulness skills that may protect you from the effects of future stress.

My own possible barriers/problems, and possible solutions to them:

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Ways to get back on track with mindfulness practice:

- Increase your informal mindfulness practice. As you experience the benefits of informal practice, you may find you are more motivated to include formal practice in your schedule.
- Commit to practicing a mindfulness exercise for a very short period of time. Sometimes large commitments seem intimidating when our lives are so busy, and we are more likely to do something when it seems easy and doable.
- If your schedule has changed and your old mindfulness practice times no longer work, revise this plan and think about new times that would work for you now.
- Contact a Health Coach and request an individual meeting to review mindfulness techniques and discuss barriers and possible solutions for keeping a mindfulness practice.
- Other ideas for getting back on track:

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(Jennifer Sweeton, Psy.D., Workings of Well-Being, Inc.)