

## Relaxation and Coping Skills

- Stress isn't always a bad thing, but too much stress is harmful to your physical and mental health and can lead to anxiety, and distress.
- Coping and relaxation skills can help you manage stress and anxiety during your recovery. They can help you to:
  - Improve quality of life by managing anxiety and intrusive thoughts
  - Decrease the stress hormones and their effects on your body
  - Have some control over your response to stress, as you learn to cope

### **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction**

- Is an effective treatment for reducing stress and anxiety from daily life and chronic illness.
- Trains the mind to be thinking minute-to-minute.
- Redirects the mind to level of higher awareness, keenly observing thoughts and emotions, **but not judging them.**
- Letting thoughts and emotions pass without being immersed in them.
- *Example – like when you watch the sky on a clear day, clouds and birds move through your vision, negative thoughts pass through your mind **but they don't stay.***

### **Mindfulness and Grounding**

- Can be a helpful coping strategy for flashbacks, anxiety, or if you feel disconnected from reality.
- If you don't want to accept intrusive thoughts, you can attempt to control them by interrupting thought processes in your brain.
- You can replace those thoughts with other thoughts for the moment, but you will want to process those thoughts later with a therapist.
- Take notes or journal about what triggered your distressing thoughts and how you coped with them.
- Use your five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste to connect to the "here and now").

### **Grounding Techniques**

- Firmly hold a piece of ice, or splash cold water on your face

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- Bite into a lemon, or eat something delicious – Focus on how it tastes, feels, and smells.
- Listen to loud music.
- Look around you, then name and describe objects in the room.
- Think to yourself or say aloud, “That was then. This is now. I am safe here.”
- Hum a song or try to think of a poem or a song’s lyrics.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Feel the ground under your feet and sensations of your skin.

### **Deep Breathing Exercises**

- You can learn to decrease stress response by using the body’s natural reaction to slow and deep breaths.
- Inhale through the nose slowly and deeply to the count of 10.
- Make sure your stomach goes up and down, rather than having your chest rise.
- Exhale through the nose slowly and completely to the count of 10.
- To help quiet the mind, concentrate fully on breathing and counting through each cycle, repeating 5-10 times.

### **Positive Imagining**

- Sit or lay comfortably and quietly, breathing deeply.
- Think about a place in your past that you really liked, and that made you happy (You can go back to childhood memories if you want to).
- Imagine that you are laying or sitting there (beach, woods, fishing hole, celebration, home, or wherever).
- Use all of your senses to experience it - see, hear, smell, touch, taste, and enjoy it for at least 10 minutes.
- When you are ready, open your eyes, thinking positive thoughts for a few more minutes before getting up.

### **Take a Mindfulness Break**

Watch and listen to this video with a variety of Nature Music (1.11 minutes) at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV\\_DX9u57jk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV_DX9u57jk) and choose which one you liked the most.

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## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

- Lay in a comfortable position without crossing your legs.
- Maintain slow, deep breathing.
- Concentrate on each body part while tensing each muscle as tightly as possible for a count of 5-10.
- Release completely. It should feel heavy, warm, and limp.
- Begin with the head and progress to toes in muscle groups.
- Include the forehead, eyes, mouth, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, chest, stomach, thighs, calves, and feet.
- Optional: When finished with the muscles on the outside of the body, you can imagine tensing and releasing internal muscles.

## **Muscle Stretching**

- Promote relaxation and reduce stress by stretching muscles for 5-10 minutes.
- Don't bounce when stretching (or you could injure your muscles).
- You can choose which areas to gently stretch.
- Imagine the tension leaving you as you stretch (only stretch to a point where you are still comfortable).
- Exhale into the stretch and inhale as you release it.
- Breathe deeply and slowly, without holding your breath.
- Closing your eyes can help you be more aware of your body's responses.

## **Stretching Tense Muscles**

- Sit up straight and inhale.
- Exhale as you lower your head down to your chest, with a gentle stretch on the back of your neck and your shoulders.
- Roll your right ear toward right shoulder while inhaling. Drop your chin to your chest again while exhaling. Repeat this on the left.
- Drop your arms to your sides and push both shoulders forward. Raise them toward your ears and slowly circle them back and downward 2 or 3 times. Change directions and repeat.

# Relaxation and Coping Skills

## Using Coping Statements

- I'm going to be all right. I know my feelings are not always rational. I will get through this.
- Right now, I have some feelings I don't like. They will disappear when I relax and calm down. I will be fine.
- Anxiety is not dangerous, but it is very uncomfortable. I will feel better if I do something. I think I'll take a walk.
- So I feel a little anxiety now. SO WHAT? It's not the first time. I am going to take some nice deep breaths and keep on going.
- I am slowly moving in a better direction. Sometimes good things can come from hard times.

## Using Positive Self-Talk

- I am a valuable and important person.
- I am worthy of the respect of others.
- I can bounce back quickly from setbacks.
- I expect to be able to reach my goals.
- I am responsible for my life, growth, and health.
- I am not bothered by negative opinions or attitudes of others.
- It is OK to do first things first, one step at a time.
- I am kind to myself. I deserve kindness and compassion.

## Meditating

- "Settle the mind" so you can think more calmly.
- Is more useful to increase serenity, rather than for relaxation.
- It's best not to meditate at bedtime because it can energize you.
- Meditation can help people be more in control of inner thoughts, and "present in the moment".
- Problems of the world can fade from your awareness.
- There is no point in trying to meditate unless you want to make it a habit – Benefits come with regular use.

## Taking a Walk

- "Let off some steam" - Reduce tension and increase energy.

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- Think more clearly by getting away from the situation for a while.
- Increase the brain's production of endorphins (natural chemicals your body makes to help relax and re-energize you).
- Observe the beauty of nature, clouds, sun, flowers, birds, and trees
  - Bring yourself closer to your spiritual side

### Relaxing with Spirituality

- For people of faith, **prayer** can give a person benefits similar to meditation, without its drawbacks.
  - Can help “settle the mind” and increase serenity
- Tend to your **spiritual life** (in your own way) to help you deal with stress.
- Losing someone or something very important to you, or losing your **sense of meaning** in your life can be very difficult without your spiritual connections.
- If you are a part of a faith community, you have a whole network of support that is available to you.

### Socializing and Leisure Activities

- **Social relationships** can be relaxing – Both people and pets can be comforting to spend time with.
- Show respect for another person's opinions, even if they are different than yours.
- Focus on “**active listening**” while other people talk.
- **Laugh** at stress with a “comedy break” - watch your favorite comedy video or TV show, read a comic or funny book.
- **Write in a journal** or diary to help sort out your feelings.

### Sleeping Better

- If you can't seem to fall asleep, try a relaxation technique.
- If that doesn't work, get out of bed and into a comfortable chair and read a book or do other quiet activities.
- Enjoy yourself, and stay up as long as you want to.
- When you start feeling tired, lay down. Even if you don't fall asleep right away, you will be able to lay in bed relaxed.

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- Rather than tossing and turning in bed, this can reduce your anxiety about not sleeping well.

### **Exploring and Using Community Resources**

- Find an advocate to defend, support, or help you (like a trusted health care provider).
- Find the community resources you need – Call 211 for information and referral, or for a crisis line.
- Ask for help when you need it. Keep asking – you're worth it.
- Community Support Programs may provide housing, employment, legal aid, and social networks.
- Overcoming problems is a way of coping that begins by building on your individual strengths.

### **Discussion:**

*Which coping techniques have you tried?*

*Were they helpful or not?*

*Would there be any reason to try relaxation techniques again if they did not work the first time?*

### **Conclusion**

- Coping and managing stress can improve your health, relationships, and mood.
- Effective coping skills help you feel more in control, giving you more ability to plan and to solve problems.
- If you handle stressful situations more directly, using skills you have learned, your anxiety begins to improve.
- Along with your other treatments, relaxation and coping skills can be very valuable tools on your recovery journey.