

Taking charge — Behaviour Change Handbook

Welcome

This handbook will focus on how your lifestyle and behaviour changes can support you to reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes. You will look at some of the challenges you might encounter. This handbook offers skills and techniques for managing stress, thoughts and sleep.

To make lasting changes to your health and wellbeing you will need to incorporate what you have already learned into your life in a meaningful way. Ideally these habits will become as automatic as the old habits you are trying to change. We hope you will then feel confident to maintain these changes in the future.

Not everything in our lives and the challenges we come across are within our control. You can learn how to identify what is within your control and what is not. When you find things that are not within your control you can learn some techniques for managing the stress that this can create.
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SMART Goals

SMART describes the essential features of any successful goal. Use it as a checklist to ensure that your goals include these features for maximum success.

Specific

Your goal needs to be clear. 'I want to lose 5 kg' is specific. 'I want to be lighter' is too vague. How will you know when you've got there?

Measurable

This will help you to monitor your progress. 'I will exercise 3 times a week for half an hour' is measurable. 'I want to exercise more' isn't. How will you know if you are exercising more?

Achievable

The goal must be within your current control and realistic for your circumstances. 'I want to be a millionaire' may not be achievable for most of us. 'I would like to save enough money to go on holiday next year's is more achievable.

Relevant (or can also be realistic)

Must be relevant to your current needs, values and motivation. E.g. 'I want to get fit enough to run a half marathon' won't be relevant if you hate running. 'I want to go to a dance class once a week' may be more relevant for some. The chances of achieving a goal will increase if the focus is on something you enjoy.

Timely

Deciding how long it will take to reach your target is important. 'I will lose 5 kg by the end of March' has a clear time frame which helps to boost motivation. Without it, you can drift of course, lose sight of your goal and lose your motivation.

It is a good idea to review your goals regularly. Some will be easy to achieve while others may need to be revisited and updated.

Examples of SMART goals

Long-term goals

In the next two to three months, I would like to:

- Reduce my risk of developing type 2 diabetes by lowering my HbA1c to below 42mmol/mol so it's within the healthy range.
- Lose 3-6kg (1/2 - 1 stone) in weight.
- Quit smoking.
- Learn more about food and how it affects me, my health and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- Develop an understanding about the impact of foods and their relationship to my health, specifically the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Why?

- For my general health and wellbeing as I want to be able to do the things I enjoy.
- I have a family history of diabetes so I want to reduce my chances of developing type 2 diabetes myself.
- To improve my quality of life and not be dependent on other people.

Short-term goals

- Walk for 15-20 minutes at a brisk pace every other day i.e. 3-4 times a week.
- Use a health app or a pedometer to monitor step count 2-3 days a week.
- I will walk up and down the stairs 3-4 times at least 2-3 times a week.
- I will incorporate 3-5 minutes of mindfulness meditation on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Top tips

- Make sure your goals are SMART.
- Remember to set smaller short-term targets or stepping stone goals — this will help you appreciate your progress better.
- Reward yourself for achieving goals. Choose rewards that will make you feel positive, like a day out, a haircut, going to the cinema or meeting up with a friend.
- Don't worry if you don't seem to be achieving your goal. Ask yourself if it's something you really want? If so, do you need to set a smaller short-term goal?
- Try working with someone else to set goals. You can encourage each other and give a fresh perspective.
- Focus on one goal at a time so you can give it your full attention without becoming overwhelmed.

Goal setting

Consider what you have learned today.

Can you think of a new goal you could set to help achieve your long-term targets?

Chapter 1: Values and obstacles — understanding your habits

At the end of this chapter, you should:

- Understand motivation and why it is important to set SMART goals.
- Understanding the challenges that we come up against can be either internal (to do with our thoughts, feelings and habits) or external (things that happen to us that we can't always control).
- Be able to recognise helpful and unhelpful habits and how to change unhelpful habits.
- Be able to use your family and friends as support.
- Understand problem solving as a way of tackling external obstacles.
- Set your goals in line with your values.

Motivation

One of the most important ways of maintaining your motivation is to make SMART goals. It is always important that your goals are SMART so that you have a clear idea of where you started and what you want to achieve. That way you will know when you have achieved it. It is also important that your goals are in line with your lifestyle and values.

Your values are the things that are important to you in life and give you the most reward and satisfaction. Finally make sure you have set a timeline for your goals. If you don't, you may lose your focus.

Take a moment to consider the goals that you set previously.

- What has been successful?
- What were the challenges?
- Could you revise these targets to be more effective?

Obstacles

Think of the challenges you are facing in trying to achieve your goals – these could be termed obstacles. Try and identify what obstacles you have come across. There may be obstacles that were not entirely within your control. We might think of these as external obstacles. It is also likely that some of these obstacles were internal things that come from the way you think, feel and behave.

For example: our family often influence us and are considered external obstacles, but the way we feel about our interactions with them are internal e.g. my family won't enjoy the meals as much if they are healthier. This might be true, or it might just be our way of thinking.

It can help to identify your obstacles by writing them down. Draw out the table below and place your obstacles in each column based on your level of control over them. Are they internal, or external obstacles?

To help you here are some examples of some of the obstacles people have encountered:

- Time.
- Other people.
- My family.
- Too many other things going on.
- Money.
- Other worries.
- It just wasn't a big enough priority.
- Other health worries.
- Still don't really understand.
- I have made other changes.
- Fear.
- Anxiety.
- Boredom.

Do any of these apply to you?

Are they internal or external obstacles?

Internal obstacles

(Thoughts and feelings)

I have lots of deadlines at work and I feel stressed that I can't complete them all.

I find it hard to sleep at night, because I keep thinking about my health problems.

External obstacles

I planned to go on a run this evening, but the weather is terrible - it's raining and slippery.

I struggle to sleep at night, because I have a really uncomfortable mattress and noisy neighbours next door.

External obstacles can be overcome by problem solving and setting SMART goals.

Internal obstacles require different strategies such as mindfulness, self-compassion and relaxation exercises.

Habits

Sometimes it is also our habits that can get in the way of making changes. Habits are usually behaviours that we have built up over many years. They often start because they are a way of helping us to break immediate anxiety, tension, boredom or fatigue. Many unhelpful habits can be related to diet and food and it is possible that you have already discovered what your unhelpful habits might be.

It can be helpful to write down your helpful habits that enable you to achieve your health goals and to acknowledge your hard work. Can you think of two or three helpful habits?

Try and identify what your habits might be. There are some examples to help you get started.

Very often we are unaware of habits – they have become almost automatic behaviours, so we don't necessarily know when they are happening.

Think about when and why your unhelpful habits might have started. It can help to keep a diary.

Unhelpful habit

Flopping down on the sofa after getting back from work.

Snacking on chocolate while at the computer.

Helpful habit that I'll try next time

Instead of flopping down on the sofa after getting back from work, I will have a shower then go out for a walk.

Instead of snacking on chocolate while at the computer I will have a drink of water available.

Creating new helpful habits

It is often best to break unhelpful habits one at a time. It can take about 21 days to retrain a behaviour and during this time it will take some time a behaviours thinking on your part so don't overwhelm yourself. It is also likely that the old unhelpful habit will give you some intrinsic reward. If it is to do with eating it might be a sugar rush from snacking on sweet food or it might be relief from hunger, boredom or stress.

You will need to reward yourself during the time you are trying to establish a new habit. The reward from the new habit needs to begin to outweigh what you are no longer getting from the old habit and slowly the balance will change. It will also help to try and identify the thoughts you have before you slip into an old habit.

You need to be consistent with your new habit and the reward, as that will help you learn more quickly. A good reward, could be putting a few pence aside each time you do your new helpful habit and save towards something you would like.

Think about when and why your unhelpful habits might have started. It can help to keep a diary.

1. Identify one unhelpful habit that is stopping you from achieving your health goals and write it down.
2. Write down emotional or environmental triggers that are associated with your unhelpful habit.
3. If you know them, write down common thoughts that accompany this (e.g. I will feel better if I do this).
4. Write down what you will achieve by engaging in your habit (e.g. relief, distraction, etc.) and what you are actually achieving.
5. What different outcomes would you like in order to achieve your health goals?
6. Think of a helpful habit that might replace the unhelpful habit.
7. Now go back to your 'triggers' – could you change your triggers?
8. Can you try and change your thoughts? It might help to write down a new thought to remind you.

If for example you snack on sweet things while you are working at a computer, try to stop work for a few moments to avoid mindless eating and have a drink or a healthy snack available. Eventually your brain will link the same sense of relief from the different snack. Or leave exercise equipment out so you can easily see it and you will link seeing the exercise equipment with wanting to do the exercise.

Changing habits

Consistency is key

- You must be consistent with changing the trigger, otherwise the new habit will take far longer to stick, or it may not stick at all.
- Reward yourself. This is an essential part of changing a habit. Good rewards might be a new gym kit or a new cookbook to help you find new ideas for healthy eating recipes.
- It is much easier to replace a habit with something new, rather than just not do something. If you just say to yourself 'I must not have biscuits' it is very hard to change anything. Try replacing the biscuits, and the trigger that makes you reach for the biscuits.
- Give yourself time. Changing habits does not happen instantly and you may have times when you think you are failing. Don't be too hard on yourself.

The law of intermittent reinforcement

Have you ever played the lottery, entered a raffle or gambled? These behaviours can become very difficult to break because the next time you fill in that lottery ticket might be the time you win the jackpot. Yes, the chances are small, but it might just be you.

The trouble with this is that you have no control over whether or when it might happen, but the slight chance of winning such an amazing prize keeps you filling in those tickets.

A behaviour that has occasional and unpredictable reward like this is often the hardest to break.

If you control the reward and are consistent, it will be easier to break some of those old habits.

Distraction

Sometimes simple distraction works as a way of starting to change habits, especially if you are caught in an unexpected situation. Try getting up and moving out of that situation for a few moments so it temporarily gets you out of the circumstances where you are about to give in to the temptation. It is best if you distract yourself with a task that is mentally or physically active. Watching television or reading a book is not so effective, as they are quite passive tasks and you will find yourself drifting to the habit you are trying to break.

Managing situations with other people

Sometimes one of the hardest things when you are changing behaviours is managing situations with other people. Friends and family can put pressure on us to do things the old way or tempt us with food or snacks we are trying to give up. It can be very hard to say 'no', especially if your new way of doing things affects them.

But family and friends can also be a huge support to us when we are trying to change things, so it is important to try and get this right. Talk to your family or the people you live with about the things you have learned and the goals you would like to set.

Talking about something helps to make it feel more real and helps us to remember and understand things. You may need to ask your family to change their eating habits for you to help yourself.

Try to avoid eating separately from your family, just because you are eating something different. This will be more difficult and lonely, so it will be helpful to gain their support. It is best to discuss what you would like to do with your family first. This can help them to see how important these changes are to you.

- Set a start date for the new plan so you are all prepared.
- Try negotiating e.g. chips some days, vegetables on others.
- Try doing things gradually. Make a plan – have a healthy option one day per week for a couple of weeks and gradually build up your healthier meals until you are doing it 7 days per week.

If you would like to know more about being assertive, please see chapter 6.

Problem solving

One way of managing the external obstacles can be to try a problem-solving approach. This can help you to come up with solutions that you may not have thought of before.

We'll work through a framework for this now. Try thinking outside the box and you may find that from new ideas something realistic will turn up. It can be helpful to work through this approach with your family, especially if you need to work on things together.

1. Define the problem

What is the problem you would like to deal with?

2. Think of solutions

Think of all the possible solutions. It can help to think laterally, be creative. Even the crazy solutions might turn out to have a grain of helpfulness in them!

3. Pick a possible solution

4. Implement your solution

If it doesn't work try another solution.

5. Review your results

Here's an example:

Step 1 - Define the problem - No time to exercise.

Step 2 Think of solutions

- Write a to-do list to help manage your time.
- Re-prioritise your tasks.
- Schedule out time in the day for yourself.
- Find time to do something throughout the day.
- Set a timer.
- Make a weekly plan.

Step 3 - Pick a possible solution

Step 4 - Implement your solution - Write a to-do list for the day, including 10 mins of at home exercise following a video

Step 5 Review your results

Values

It is important to ensure that your goals are in line with your values. Values are the things that are most meaningful for you in life, things you consider important and influence the decisions you make. Of course, values can change over time to fit in with your life circumstances but try not to let your values get lost in life, work and commitments. If that starts to happen, life can begin to feel as though it is getting uninteresting and unrewarding and can make you vulnerable to stress and depression.

Try and identify the three most important things for you now and think about how you can set goals around them. Have a look at the examples below for some examples.

- Have good quality of life.
- Have a circle of close friends.
- To have an active mind.
- To be active.
- Travel and experience new things.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle.
- Be open and learn new things.
- Maintain physical independence.
- To be more mobile.
- Not to have to rely on medication.

Values are different from goals. Goals can be achieved but values are more like a 'compass' for life and influence the direction you want to head in.

Think about some of the goals you have already set and how far you have come towards achieving them. If you are stuck on a goal and feel you haven't achieved it maybe this is because it isn't in line with your values. Try going back to the values you have identified above and make goals that are specific to that value.

For example: 'I really value being physically fit to play with my grandchildren. My SMART goal could therefore be walking briskly for 30 minutes every day in order to maintain my fitness level'.

Values can also be important in helping to motivate you. If you need to find a reward to help you work towards a goal think about a reward in line with one of your values. For example, if one of your values is to 'be open and learn new things' reward yourself by taking time to try a new pastime or take a class.

Top tip

Problem solve around your challenges and set goals to overcome these. Make sure these goals align with your health values. Consider how you can access social or family support to help you with your goals.

Additional resources and further reading:

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/low-mood-stress-anxiety.aspx
- *Essentials of Managing Stress*. 2014, B.L.Seaward.
- *The Stress Management Workbook*. 2014, Lynn van Brakel.
- *The Assertiveness Workbook*. 2013, Dr Dena Mitchell.
- *The Little Book of Yes*. 2018, Noah Goldstein, Steve Martin and Robert Cialdini.
- www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-destress.html
- www.diabetes.org.uk

Goal setting

Consider what you have learned today.

Can you think of a new goal you could set to help achieve your long-term targets?

Chapter 2: Stress, mindfulness and mindful eating

This chapter looks at stress and how stress affects the body, including the way it can lead to high blood sugar levels. You will think about the key stressors in your life at present. You will also identify which of these you can control, and look at some ways to manage stress better, especially if you do not have any control over the events leading to stress.

At the end of this chapter, you should:

- Understand how stress can affect your everyday life and the significance of the ‘fight or flight’ response.
- Recognise how stress increases the risk of type 2 diabetes.
- Know how to identify which stressors you can change and which you cannot change.
- Know how mindfulness and other techniques can be used to manage stress.
- Understand what comfort eating is and how mindful eating can be used to tackle the problem.

Take a moment to consider the goals that you set previously.

- What has been successful?
- What were the challenges?
- Could you revise these targets to be more effective?

Stress management

We live in a highly stressful world.

Many years ago, during primitive times, the main stresses that people faced were protecting themselves from danger (which was usually physical) and acquiring food (which usually involved killing animals). The human body evolved to cope with these physical dangers and our stress response developed so that we were able to manage the physiological demands of these situations. This is known as the ‘fight or flight’ response.

What are the signs of the ‘fight or flight’ response?

The brain goes on red alert and the body prepares for action. These can include:

- Sweating.
- Muscles tense.
- Breathe faster.
- Heart rate increases.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Mouth goes dry.
- Digestion slows down (this diverts energy into other functions needed for physical activity).
- Pupils dilate.
- Adrenaline released.
- Liver releases glucose.

When we are in a dangerous situation, messages are sent from the brain to prepare the body for action. Stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline are produced. Non-essential tasks like stop digestion and extra energy are supplied to our muscles, so we can escape or fight effectively.

What happens when we are stressed?

Today, direct physical danger is less common, but the body responds in the same way to other kinds of stress, such as pressure to achieve a work target, performance (for example exam stress), and financial pressures. These situations do not generally need a physical response, but a more measured 'thinking' response.

However, when stress doesn't result in physical action, the build-up of adrenaline and cortisol can cause problems, and this can lead to poor long-term health. Very often just perceiving a situation to be stressful can set off the body's 'fight or flight' response.

For example, if we are watching a scary or tense film our heart rate can increase. Sometimes we are under so much stress over a long period of time, that our bodies are under 'chronic physiological stress'. It is therefore essential for our health and wellbeing that we try to manage our stress.

First, we need to learn which situations in our lives are contributing to stress. We need to identify which of these we can control or partly control. Then we need to learn stress management techniques to manage stress more effectively, particularly with the situations we cannot control.

Some ways stress can affect us:

- Cognitive (thinking)

Being forgetful and worrying about things – often expecting the worst possible outcome in situations, not doing as well at things as we would like or expect.

- Emotional

Fear, anxiety, low mood or mood swings, feeling helpless and avoiding situations.

- Physical

Poor health, pain arising from muscle tension, high blood pressure, digestive problems (IBS for example).

- Behavioural

Eating too much or too little, poor-quality sleep, putting off or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, drugs or cigarettes to relax.

Stress and the link with type 2 diabetes

As mentioned before, when we experience stressful situations, adrenaline and cortisol are released.

These hormones trigger many actions in the body, including the liver to release glucose into the bloodstream. They also make insulin less effective, so energy is not as readily available to the muscles that need it.

If we exercise, we can reduce blood glucose, insulin, cortisol and adrenaline levels back to normal. However, if we do not manage our stress, chronically high levels of these hormones may increase the risk of type 2 diabetes. They may also increase appetite and lead to cravings for highly refined and unhealthy diet choices.

This can lead to increased fat storage, known as visceral or abdominal fat. The higher your waist circumference, the more your risk for type 2 diabetes increases.

Physical activity and exercise

We have already found out that physical activity not only helps improve blood glucose levels but also reduces insulin resistance and can help manage stress levels. Low intensity exercise, like a walk in the park, is best to lower the hormones associated with chronic stress.

Sources of stress

Stress can come from external and internal sources. External sources are usually the pressures we are under in our lives.

Top tip

Try not to waste too much time worrying about the things you can't change. This will make you feel worse. Try instead to do something about the things you can change.

Managing the stress

You can learn to manage stress more effectively even if you can't actually control or change some of the causes of stress in your life.

Even if you are not under too much stress at the moment, it is always good to have activities that you find relaxing. They will have a positive effect on your health and wellbeing.

There are some ideas below. Many of these ideas take a bit of practice until you learn a new way, and different ideas will work for different people. Be bold and try out some new things.

Ideas:

- Take a few deep breaths – remember it is important to breathe out slowly – while you try to figure out how to cope with a sudden stressful situation.
- Say 'stop' to yourself and count slowly to 10. Again, this can be very helpful in a sudden stressful situation. This slows your heart rate down and helps to slow the 'fight or flight' response.
- Share your problems by talking with family or friends or someone impartial. It is always good to share a problem.
- Make more time for your interests and hobbies.
- Look after yourself. Take some time for yourself during a day, however busy you are. You will use the rest of the time more productively.
- Take regular exercise. A walk can be a great way to clear the head.
- Make sure you're eating nutritious food.
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep. Refer to chapter 4.
- Use calming breathing exercises or try yoga, alternate nostril breathing.
- Are your thoughts helping or hindering you? See chapter 3.
- Remember – not worrying doesn't mean you don't care. Worrying constantly about something you can't control is probably not helpful. Devote your energy to trying to solve problems you can control.

Think about some stress management techniques that work for you.

Of course, the internal stress we put ourselves under are also very important. Managing and understanding our thoughts can be helpful here. This will be covered in the next chapter.

Not all stress is bad

Not all stress is bad and it's important that we have things in our lives that challenge us, to keep us motivated, and stop us from being bored and disengaged.

We need a certain amount of pressure to perform at our best. Too little challenge and we tend to get bored and even depressed. Too much challenge and the stress become too much. This often causes more stress, and performance goes down even further.

Mindfulness

One way of managing our response to stressful situations and life events is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a way of listening to your body in the present moment, being aware of what you are feeling, without judgement. Mindfulness exercises encourage you to become aware of the present moment (e.g. thoughts, emotions, sensations).

With a bit of practice, you can learn to 'just be' and allow yourself to notice what's happening around you now; to not judge things as good or bad but learn to relax into the moment and let go of whatever you might be experiencing. You can think of it as a way of not fighting yourself and your thoughts.

Mindfulness can help to deal with unhelpful habits, such as reaching for comfort foods when you are stressed. It can also help you to deal with internal feelings such as self-criticism.

A mindfulness approach reduces the 'flight or fight' response. Therefore, mindfulness can have a positive impact on blood sugar and blood pressure levels.

Key principles of mindfulness

When practicing mindfulness, choose one thing to focus your attention on. This could be: your breath, a sound, a muscle contraction, the food you are about to eat.

It is perfectly normal for your mind to wander. Simply acknowledge that you are distracted and then return your attention back to the exercise. The more you practice, the less you will become distracted.

It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong to mindfulness. Try to think of it as a way of being. You are noticing the direction of your thoughts and how you are feeling in your body rather than trying to do or think any particular way. Don't judge or question yourself but just notice

what is happening to your body and your thoughts. If you would like to try the body scan mindfulness exercise, you can read it in Chapter 5 Relaxation and mindfulness strategies.

Comfort eating

Mindfulness can also help us in the way we respond to food.

Although we may eat to satisfy physical hunger, we also know that lots of other factors influence why, what and when we eat. Emotional eating can be one of these influences. Food is one of our basic physical needs, but we are emotional beings our emotions (happiness, sadness,

anger, fear, worry, stress, boredom) often influence our eating patterns. Eating is also a social activity and in many cultures coming together for a meal or for a celebration is an important and valued part of family life and cultural tradition.

Research has shown that we commonly override our body's signals of fullness. This can be particularly true when we are experiencing negative emotions. If food is within easy reach, we can use it to 'overcome or manage' these situations.

The connection between emotions and food is one that is set down from when we are born. Food is not just a fuel for us – it has been conditioned as a soother of emotions for as long as we can remember.

Therefore, even as adults we may eat to 'comfort ourselves' especially in times of distress or feeling down. If this happens a lot, we should try to find other ways to comfort ourselves and break this cycle.

Mindful eating

Mindful eating is a way of trying to break or reduce this link.

Try the following exercises:

The most important components are:

- Eat when hunger sensations are present.
- Eat more slowly. This will help your digestion as it will give time to allow the message that you have eaten enough to reach your brain.
- Stop eating when you are full.
- Understand there are no bad foods. Certain foods have a more rapid effect on blood glucose, but it does not necessarily make that food bad – what is more important is how often and how much of these foods you are consuming.

Try mindful eating:

Mindful eating teaches us to understand and respond to our body's cues more sensitively. It is about using our senses to experience food more.

1. Use your five senses (sight, smell, touch, sound, taste) to experience the food.
2. Recognise and try to break the habit of mindless eating.
3. Be aware of why you decide to start and stop eating.

Goal setting

Consider what you have learned today.

Can you think of a new goal you could set to help achieve your long-term targets?

This month I will try the following methods for managing stress:

- I will try eating mindfully in the following situations:
- I will get the support of the following people:

Top tip

Think carefully about the ways in which stress might be affecting your wellbeing. Problem solve around the things you can change but learn to manage the effect of stress if there are things you cannot change.

You may find the following mobile apps useful for relaxation and mindfulness techniques:

- Headspace (NHS recommended)
- Calm

Additional resources and further reading:

- The Stress Management Workbook – a guide to developing resilience. 2014, Lynn van Brakel.
- Mindful Eating, 2017. Sarah Jones.
- Eat Yourself Happy. 2014, Gill Paul.
- Intuitive Eating with a Side of Mindful
- Eating. 2015, Darrin Wiggins.
- The Habit Change Workbook. 2001, J Clariborn & C Pedrick.
- www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-destress.html
- www.diabetes.org.uk

Chapter 3: Making your thoughts work for you, self-compassion and visualisation

Chapter 3 will concentrate on thoughts. You will think about why and how your thoughts can contribute to stress, affect your health and your motivation.

You will learn about common unhelpful thoughts and how to change them. You'll also explore how self-compassion (looking after yourself) and visualisation can help us to become more positive and reduce stress.

At the end of this chapter, you should:

- Understand how thoughts affect feelings, behaviour and our physical bodies.
- Recognise common 'thought traps' that can get in the way of improvement.
- Identify some ways to change thoughts.
- Understand why self-compassion is so important.
- Know the importance of being positive.
- Recognise how to use visualisation as a way of increasing chances of success.

Take a moment to consider the goals that you set previously.

- What has been successful?
- What were the challenges?
- Could you revise these targets to be more effective?

Making your thoughts work for you

Our minds are constantly active, thinking about the past, present and future all the time. We always have a running commentary in our heads.

For example — think about a recent journey you had. Do you remember any of these thoughts?

- Planning your journey in your head.
- Wondering when the bus would arrive and whether you would be on time.
- Thinking about some shopping you had to fit in on the way, or the way home.
- Trying to remember what you learned last time.
- Worrying about whether your weight has changed.
- Realising you'd forgotten to text a friend.
- Looking forward to seeing a new friend that you had met on the course.

These are all thoughts.

Sometimes thoughts are helpful and positive; or they might be more neutral and practical. However sometimes thoughts aren't helpful and can leave us feeling anxious, stressed and lacking motivation. These thoughts and feelings can then affect our behaviour, causing us to withdraw, or even give up.

Look at the following thoughts. Are they helpful or unhelpful?

- I don't have time for change.
- I'll never break these habits.

- It's too hard, I'm afraid I'll fail.
- I always break my diet.
- What's the point – I might as well give up.
- I will never get fit.
- I am hopeless – I always get things wrong.

All of these thoughts are common, but they can be unhelpful. If you regularly think like this, it is like having an inner critic constantly judging you. This leaves you feeling unsupported and that you're never good enough. Over time, this kind of thinking can affect your mood and behaviour. This can hold you back from making positive changes.

Look at the following example:

- Thought – I will never stick to anything.
- Behaviour – Give up, stop the diet although. Go back to poor eating habits.
- Physical – Raised blood sugar, less energy.
- Feeling – Sad, angry, depressed.

You can see how the unhelpful thought that affects your feelings, behaviour and your physical health, all are linked.

The good news is that you can learn to change your thoughts, and by doing so you can change your mood, behaviour and improve your physical health.

- Thought – I try hard at my healthy diet but sometimes I have a bad day or am tempted.
- Behaviour – Keep going, problem solve some ways of trying not to be tempted.
- Physical – Reduced blood sugar most of the time. Healthier.
- Feeling – Pleased with yourself. Encouraged at how well I have done so far.

Recognising your thoughts

To change your thoughts, it is important to learn to be aware of what you're thinking. Keeping a diary can help you do this. Have a look at the example below and consider using this as a template for your own thought diary.

My thought diary

You may notice that there are specific situations or times of day when your thoughts become unhelpful. For example, when you're alone or at the end of a tiring or stressful day or at work.

- What was I doing? Coming here

- What was I thinking? The bus might be late, and I will be embarrassed walking in late to the session.

Thought traps

There are certain words and patterns that can creep in to thoughts that are particularly unhelpful. We could call these 'thought traps'. Here are just a few of the most common:

1. Thought trap - Catastrophising
 - How to recognise it - 'It will be a complete disaster'
 - Example of thought - I will become ill
2. Thought trap – All or nothing.
 - How to recognise it – Beware if words like 'never' and 'always'
 - Example of thought - I'm never any good at trying to change my eating habits.
3. Thought trap – Criticising yourself. Making unnecessary or unrealistic rules for yourself.
 - How to recognise it – Beware of words like 'must', 'should', 'mustn't', 'shouldn't'.
 - Example of thought - I must get my new habits right all of the time.
4. Thought trap – Low tolerance to frustration.
 - How to recognise it – I can't do this, it's too hard for me'. Beware of words like 'can't'
 - Example of thought – I can't exercise more. It won't help.
5. Thought trap – Getting things out of proportion.
 - How to recognise it – If one thing goes wrong, it's as though everything has gone wrong.
 - Example of thought – I had a bad day yesterday with my exercise. I might as well give up altogether. I'm hopeless.
6. Thought trap – Making unrealistic demands.
 - How to recognise it – Trying to be perfect.
 - Example of thought - I must do all of the exercises that have been recommended to me and not make a mistake.
7. Thought trap – Labelling.
 - How to recognise it – Making judgements on yourself.
 - Example of thought – I'm useless.

Do you recognise any of these patterns in your thoughts? Especially notice some of the words that can be unhelpful like 'never', 'always', 'can't' or 'shouldn't'. Make a note of any unhelpful thoughts that you regularly experience, and see if you can identify what thought traps these fall under.

Changing your thoughts

Once you have begun to recognise the thought traps that you fall into, it is much easier to try and change them.

Tip one: Very often the key is to try and be realistic in your expectations of yourself (and others). We are not superhuman and things will not always go right. There will be occasional setbacks and things that go wrong. When that happens, we can try to choose more helpful thoughts as in the example below:

Here's an example:

Unhelpful thought: I must do all of the exercises that have been recommended to me and not make a mistake.

Helpful (realistic) thought: I will try to do some of the recommended exercises. Any exercise I do will be an achievement.

Tip two: Try not to fall into the 'all or nothing' trap. There may be times when you feel as though you have failed at something and you fall into the trap of saying 'I always get this wrong.' If you try to see the situation as an outside observer you might see you are doing much better than you think. It is very common to just remember the bad things. It is very rarely all bad.

Here's an example:

Unhelpful thought: I am always eating unhealthily.

Helpful (realistic) thought: I did have a few bad days when I found it hard to stick to new habits, but before that I was doing OK.

Tip three: Remember there are some things you can't control. Be aware of those situations and plan ways to manage them. Don't blame yourself for the things you can't control.

Here's an example:

Unhelpful thought: If the bus is late, I will be late for the session and I will feel bad walking in late.

Helpful (realistic) thought: There is nothing I can do about the bus being late. I will apologise for being late and explain.

Positive thinking

You will probably have heard people talk about thinking positively.

There will always be challenges and setbacks in life and sometimes it is hard to see the positive side of things. Things may be out of your control. But choosing to think positively, by being realistic and optimistic, can help you to feel better and make progress with your goals and health.

Where would you place yourself on a scale from **pessimistic** to **optimistic**, with **realistic** in the middle?

If you have placed yourself at the pessimistic end of the scale, try and nudge yourself along the scale with each achievement you have. It is good to be optimistic, but be prepared for challenges too. Sometimes it is important to be realistic.

Self-compassion

Tips for positive thinking

- Focus on the things you can do, rather than the things you can't.
- Focus on your achievements.
- Think about your resources – people and information around you, people to talk to, challenges you have overcome in life.
- Try and think flexibly. Beware of the rules you set yourself. They are rarely helpful.

Try to be kind to yourself. It can be hard to make changes if things don't go as planned but don't be too hard on yourself. Instead, take some time to think about what you can do differently.

It's also important to make time for yourself, to look after yourself and to do things you enjoy or that you want to try out, like a new hobby or a long-forgotten interest. By building in activities that you enjoy on a regular basis you can improve your confidence, mood and increase your energy levels. These things don't have to be expensive or complicated – it may simply be making sure you take the time to have a nice bath or catch up with an old friend.

Being able to acknowledge when things are difficult and knowing that things don't always work out the way we hope is important. This can help us to be more flexible and think of ways around problems instead of wasting energy on fighting them or ourselves.

Understanding a problem usually goes a long way towards starting to change it.

Visualisation

Visualisation can be a powerful way of helping you to achieve your goals. Sports people have used this successfully for many years (and so have many other people doing anything that requires high level performance). An athlete will repeatedly visualise the event in their mind rehearsing techniques and increasing their chances of success. In the same way, we can all use visualisation methods to help achieve our goals.

Focus on what you want to happen, not what you don't want to happen.

For example visualise yourself how you would like to look — fitter or healthier. Think about what you would like to be doing, try doing this at least once a day.

Starting visualisation

- Stand or sit comfortably. It helps to close your eyes. Feel your energy in the centre of your body (you can do this by placing a hand on or around your belly button and try to feel where your breath starts from).
- Visualise (imagine) your goal.
- Imagine yourself achieving it and visualise yourself coping with any possible challenges.
- Breathe – take long slow breaths in and out. Concentrate especially on breathing out.
- Use positive ‘can do’ statements. For example: ‘I can enjoy a good balanced diet’.
- Use all your senses and as much imagery as possible

Try the visualisation exercise in chapter 5.

Goal setting

Consider the following sentences to help set yourself some goals for the coming month.

1. I will do the following things to be nice to myself.
2. I will change the following thought traps.
3. The following things are out of my control.
4. How I will manage things outside of my control.

Top tip

Think about what you can do, rather than what you can’t. Try making your thoughts work for you, not against you.

Additional resources and further reading:

The Habit Change Workbook. 2001, J Clariborn & C Pedrick.

The Stress Management Workbook – a guide to developing resilience. 2014, Lynne Van Brakel.
The Compassionate Mind. 2010, Paul Gilbert.

Creative Visualization: Use the Power of Your Imagination to Create What You Want in Your Life. 2010, Shakti Gawain.

Essentials of Managing Stress. 2014, B.L.Seaward.

Mindful Eating. 2017, Sarah Jones.

Consider what you have learned today

Can you think of a new goal you could set to help achieve your long-term targets?

Chapter 4: Sleep and creating your health blueprint

In this chapter you will learn about the importance of sleep in keeping yourself healthy and look at ways of ensuring you get good sleep.

You will summarise what has been covered in Taking charge and review how you can continue and sustain the achievements you have made.

By the end of this chapter you should:

- Understand why sleep is important.
- Recognise the factors that can affect healthy sleep.

- Know tips for improving sleep.
- Have a 10-step plan for keeping your lifestyle changes going.

Take a moment to consider the goals that you set previously:

What has been successful? What were the challenges? Could you revise these targets to be more effective?

Why is sleep important

Sleep helps the body to restore and regulate itself. When we sleep there are changes in brain and muscle activity.

People with poor sleep have a greater risk of a number of physical health disorders including heart disease, developing diabetes, and obesity.

A physical health condition can also disrupt sleep. For example, some of the classic symptoms of type 2 diabetes include increased urination and increased thirst. You may need to get up to use the bathroom and/or get a drink which disturbs a good night's sleep. Sleep is also easily disrupted by stress and emotional worries.

How much sleep do you need?

Typically, adults need about 7-9 hours sleep a night but this varies from person to person and during the course of our lives. Some people will live very happily and healthily on as little as 5 hours sleep a night while others may find they need 8 or 9 hours to function well during the day. Babies and small children need lots of sleep and we tend to need less sleep as we get older, perhaps even 3 or 4 hours less.

If you lose the occasional full night's sleep, it may not have much effect on your performance the following day. But if you have persistent poor sleep you may find that it does affect how you function during a day. You may have difficulty concentrating, be irritable and have mood problems.

Recommended Sleep by Age Group

Babies

- 0–3 months: 14 to 17 hours per day
- 4–11 months: 12 to 15 hours per day

Young Children

- 1–2 years: 11 to 14 hours per day
- 3–5 years: 10 to 13 hours per day

Children and Teenagers

- 6–13 years: 9 to 11 hours per night
- 14–17 years: 8 to 10 hours per night

Adults

- 18–64 years: 7 to 9 hours per night

Older Adults

- 65 years and over: 7 to 8 hours per night

How much sleep do you get at night?

Think about the amount of sleep you get and the amount of time that you spend in bed but awake or only dozing.

On average, how many hours of sleep do you get each night?

On average, what is the total time you spend in bed?

If there is a big difference between the two then that might indicate poor quality sleep.

What can affect your sleep quality

There are many things that can affect sleep quality.

In chapter 3 we learnt that thoughts can affect behaviour, feelings and our physical body. Sleep is also affected by behaviour, thoughts, feelings and our physical health.

Behaviours

- Drinking alcohol.
- Drinking caffeine or other stimulants.
- Eating a large meal.
- Napping during the day.
- Lots of screen time late at night.

Physical effects

- Chronic pain.
- Needing to use the bathroom at night.
- Poor breathing.
- (for example if you have a bad cold).

Feelings

- Anxious.
- Restless.
- Worried.

Thoughts and worries

- 'If I don't sleep tonight I won't get anything done tomorrow'.
- 'I never sleep well'.

One of the things that can happen with sleep is that we underestimate the sleep we get. If we are worried, and our mind is racing, time seems to pass more quickly, so 15 minutes can seem to be about 30 minutes.

It can help to keep a sleep diary. This will give you a more objective record of what is happening to your sleep over a period of time. It might also help you identify the reasons why you don't sleep. You may find there is a pattern to the week.

You can write this in a notebook, table, or digital document.

Example Entry

- **Day:** Thursday
- **What I did before bed:** Watched TV for two hours
- **Bedtime:** 10:00 pm
- **Wakeup time:** 7:00 am
- **Hours of sleep:** 5 hours
- **Quality of sleep:** Poor – woke up several times during the night
- **How I felt the next day:**
 - Tired
 - Found it hard to concentrate
 - Craved sugary foods and caffeine

Tips for improving sleep

Be aware of your body clock

If you have persistently poor sleep, you need to be quite strict with yourself by trying to set a clear routine. This means going to bed at about the same time each night and getting up about the same time every morning. Your body clock (known as circadian rhythm) will begin to set 'sleepy' messages at night and 'waking up' messages in the morning. If you go to bed and get up at very different times every day your body clock doesn't have such a good chance to develop good sleep habits.

If your sleep is good, or once your sleep has improved, it does not matter so much if this routine varies occasionally but you need to set the body clock to start with.

If you need to change your routine, for example if you have a new job and need to leave an hour earlier in the morning: change things gradually, by about 15 minutes at a time over a period of a few weeks.

Thoughts

If you find that you wake up with worried thoughts, or they stop you going to sleep, try thinking of an alternative thought:

Exercise: Changing Your Thoughts

Step 1: Notice the worried thought

Think about the worry that came into your mind.

Worried thought:

Write down the thought.

Step 2: Think of an alternative thought

Now try to think of a different, more balanced or reassuring thought.

Alternative thought:

Write down the new thought.

If you have worries about the following day or are nervous you will forget something important, keep a piece of paper by your bed and write it down. That way you can leave the worry until the morning.

Top tip

Recognise that it is normal to have some days when you feel tired, even after a good night's sleep.

Behaviour

- Don't drink (or limit) caffeine in the few hours before you go to bed: caffeine is a stimulant and will interfere with your sleep. Remember caffeine is found in other drinks as well as coffee including tea, fizzy drinks and even some painkillers.
- Getting up in the night to go to the toilet is common for lots of people. If this is something that affects you consider stopping drinking fluid 90 mins before bed. Remember to stay hydrated during the day.
- Limit alcohol in the few hours before you go to bed: alcohol is dehydrating so you may wake up thirsty or needing to go to the bathroom. This can make you restless.

- Try not to exercise late at night, just before you go to bed: it won't tire you out, it will wake you up.
- If you want to exercise near to your bedtime, either allow your body time to recover after exercise, at least 90 minutes before bedtime, or make sure any exercises are of a low intensity, such as stretching or a slow-paced walk.
- Try not to have a large meal late at night.
- Limit your screen time: there is increasing evidence that screen time late at night does affect sleep. The 'blue light' of electronic screens acts as a stimulant and it is likely that what we are watching or doing on the screen also keeps our mind active just as we want to slow down. Try not to look at phones, tablets or any other electronic device as you are going to bed.

Your bedroom

It is also very important that you make your bedroom a good place for sleep. You and your body need to associate your bedroom and your bed as a place for sleeping, not for other activities.

- Open a window and keep the bedroom well ventilated. Stuffy air can produce restless sleep.
- Try to keep a regular comfortable temperature – not too warm.
- Limit light and noise.
- Avoid distractions such as TV. If you do have a TV in your bedroom switch it off before you try to go to sleep.
- Try to make your bed comfortable.
- Avoid clutter and make your bedroom a nice place to go, where you will be relaxed and ready for sleep.
- Try to keep your bedroom a place for sleeping only. Go to bed when you are ready to go to sleep. This will help you to get into the habit of sleeping when you go to bed.

Additional resources and further reading:

Why We Sleep – the new science of sleep and dreams. 2017, Matthew Walker.

The Stress Management Workbook (chapter 12 Putting it all Together). 2014, Lynne van Brakel.

If you are worried that your thoughts and stress are causing anxiety or depression, you can find out about your local IAPT service (Improving Access to Psychological Services). They may have a service that can offer you more specific personalised help for these symptoms.

Keeping your lifestyle changes going

Think back to what you have learned during the programme. It is time to try and put it all together.

The following 10 step guide might help you

(from The Stress Management Workbook by Lynn van Brakel)

1. Identify your SMART goals.
2. Visualise success and what it will look like.
3. What is your timescale? You may need to have smaller goals to help you on your way and keep you motivated.
4. Define your actions positively 'I will...' 'I will start doing something...'
5. Try to keep a positive mindset and be kind to yourself. Recognise there may well be setbacks and work on your thoughts.
6. Try to change your environment to support you as much as you can. Make sure you have healthy food in your kitchen. Think about your opportunities to exercise.
7. Reach out to others to help you. You can help them too.
8. Congratulate and reward yourself on your achievements.
9. Review what went well. Remember the things you were proud of.
10. Think about the things that helped you along the way. You can create a tool kit to help you in the future.

My health blueprint

Look at this summary of the three parts of the course you have attended. How can you put it all together to create your health blue print for the future?

Eating well

Reducing sugary foods and drinks and refined carbohydrates can help you to improve your blood glucose levels and reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes.

Eating a healthy balanced diet, with suitable portion sizes, can also help to reduce your risk of a range of other conditions and to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Remember to review your diet and weight goals regularly and celebrate your success.

Moving more

Remember increasing any form of movement throughout your day helps improve your overall health and reduces your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Whether you opt to move more through taking up formal exercise, like swimming or cycling, or you start walking to work, or you decide to spend less time sitting on the sofa is up to you.

Pick a moving more goal you consider to be safe, realistic and maintainable.

Consider the different physical activity opportunities within your local community, apart from the health benefit these opportunities can promote, it can also help to create new relationships.

Taking charge

Think about what you can control and what you can't control. Try to be aware of the obstacles that might get in your way and prepare for a way of coping with them.

If you can control something make sure you create the right environment to change your habits to help you live a healthy lifestyle.

If you can't control something try the problem-solving cycle, or some of the relaxation and mindfulness exercises.

Be nice to yourself. Make sure your thoughts work for you, not against you.

Try creating your health blue print by completing the following exercise

Write down and complete each statement to reflect on what you plan to achieve going forward.

1. My health values are?
2. My overall/long-term health goals are?
3. My eating well goal is?
4. My moving more goal is?

5. My taking charge goal is?

My contingency plan

Write down and complete each statement to reflect on how you will manage future obstacles.

1. I might struggle to stick to my goals in times when?

2. I will address these obstacles by?

3. My toolkit contains?

4. I will review my goals regularly by?

5. I will celebrate my achievements by?

Chapter 5 Relaxation and mindfulness strategies

In Taking Charge chapters 1-4 you have learned about several ways to help yourself by using relaxation, mindfulness and visualisation. This chapter gives you some exercises to help you.

You can use these exercises together with the recordings on the app.

Before you start

Practice

Some of the ideas may seem a little odd and unfamiliar to you. However, they have all been shown to help people to achieve goals, slow down and manage unhelpful habits.

You should practice these regularly to give your mind and body a chance to get used to them. You won't necessarily get maximum benefit first time around, but it is worth persevering.

Try each of the ideas. This will help you find the ideas that work best for you.

Make time

You will need time to practice these ideas. Try and set aside a regular time when you will not be interrupted or be worrying about being late for something else.

The right place

These techniques can be done anywhere. But if you are starting out, it's best to choose a quiet and comfortable space to start with. The more you practice, the more confident you will get. You will start to remember what to say to yourself and you can then try these ideas anytime and anywhere.

1. Rhythm Breathing Exercise for Slowing down

The following exercise will guide you through a short exercise in soothing rhythm breathing. This is a helpful breathing rhythm for beginning to work on relaxation.

First, sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor, about a shoulders width apart, and your back straight and head in line. Your posture is comfortable but upright because the idea is to become relaxed but also to stay alert rather than to become floppy or sleepy.

Gently close your eyes or look down towards the floor or allow your gaze to be unfocused if you prefer. Check you have a 'gentle' relaxed facial expression. Try relaxing your facial muscles by letting your jaw drop slightly and then letting your mouth turn up into a slight smile. Increase the smile to the point that it is comfortable for you.

Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, counting to 5 as you do so. Feel the air moving down into your lungs. Hold for a count of 5 then breathe out slowly through your nose or mouth, again counting to 5. Notice how your diaphragm moves gently as you breathe in and out. For the development of soothing rhythm breathing we will be breathing slightly slower and slightly deeper than you would normally. The in breath is often about 4-5 seconds ... hold ... and then take 4-5 seconds for the out breath.

Focus particularly on the out breath and the air leaving your nose with a steady rhythm. Try to ensure that the in breath and the out breath are even and don't rush them.

As you develop your rhythm, notice and focus on the feeling of slowing down with each out breath. Notice how your body responds to your breathing and starts to relax further with each breath. Notice how this links to your smile. Let's practice that for 30 seconds.

Wait 30 secs

Now we can just 'ground ourselves for a moment'. Sense the weight of your body resting on the chair and the floor underneath you. In fact, notice how your body feels slightly heavier in the chair now that you have slowed your breath. Allow yourself to feel held and supported. Notice

the present while you stay alert with good body posture. Feel the stability in your body that has come from the slowing down and breathing.

Remember that it is perfectly ok for your mind to wander. Simply notice it happening and then gently guide your attention back to an awareness of your body and breathing steadily in and out just sensing the flow of air coming in and out of your nostrils...just gently observing...just allowing things to be as they are. Feeling your body slowing down.

And once again check on your gentle smile as you continue to experience your soothing rhythm breathing.

Wait 1 minute

Now when you are ready open your eyes or refocus and look about you, increase your smile slightly for a moment or two, and take a stretch, moving your body.

Soothing rhythm breathing can be practised at any time, whilst waiting for a bus, sitting on the train or even taking a bath. The more you practice noticing how your breathing affects your body, the more familiar you will become with allowing yourself to slow down.

2. Short Exercise for Slowing down

When you feel more confident with this you can try a quicker version of this exercise. It can be a useful way of stopping and taking a moment if you are in a stressful or challenging situation.

Sit or stand quietly and think about your breath. Feel your breath coming from the middle of your body (somewhere around your belly button). This is sometimes called 'centering yourself'.

It can help to put a hand on your lower stomach and feel it move. Your stomach should go out as you breathe in (and take in air); and in as you breathe out (and let air out).

Take a moment to ground yourself. Feel the weight of your body on a chair or the weight of your feet on the ground. Notice what the chair feels like – is it comfortable or uncomfortable? (is it soft? hard? cold? hot?) If you are standing, notice what your shoes feel like against the ground (notice where the weight is on your feet for example).

Take about 10 long slow breaths. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Concentrate especially on the breath out and imagine your body getting more relaxed with each breath. Notice if there are any areas of tension – for example your neck and shoulders can get tense. Let go of the tension and feel the weight of that particular part of your body being pulled down.

You can also say positive, relaxing statements to yourself. Here are some ideas:

'Stop.'

'I can just take a few moments to think about this situation.'

'I mustn't be too hard on myself.'

'I am really pleased with that.'

'I feel myself relaxing.'

When you are finished count backwards slowly from 4 – 1 and become aware of your surroundings again. Try and keep that feeling of relaxation as you start whatever you are doing again.

3. Body scan mindfulness

Give yourself a little time to start using this exercise. Once you are familiar with it you can try it almost anywhere as a way of getting used to the habit of staying in the present moment.

Let go of your tendency for wanting things to be different from how they are and allow them to be as they are. Give yourself the space to be as you are. Firstly, sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor, about a shoulders width apart, and your back straight and head in line.

You don't even need to try to relax. Relaxation may happen, or it may not. Relaxation isn't the aim of the body scan. If anything, the aim is to be aware of your experience, whatever it may be.

Feel the weight of your body on the chair. Notice the points of contact between the chair and your body. Each time you breathe out, allow yourself to sink a little deeper into the chair.

Become aware of the sensations of your breath.

You may feel the breath going in and out of your nostrils, or passing through the back of your throat, or feel the chest or belly rising and falling. Be aware of your breath wherever it feels most predominant and comfortable for you. Continue for a few minutes.

When you're ready, move your awareness down the left leg, past the knee and ankle and right down into the big toe of your left foot.

Notice the sensations in your big toe with a sense of curiosity. Is it warm or cold? Now focus on your little toe, then all the toes inbetween. What do they feel like? If you can't feel any sensation, that's OK.

As you breathe in, imagine the breath going down your body and into your toes. As you breathe out, imagine the breath going back up your body and out of your nose.

Expand your awareness to the sole of your foot.

Focus on the ball and heel of the foot. The weight of the heel. The sides and upper part of the foot. The ankle. Breathe into the whole of the left foot. Then, when you're ready, let go of the left foot.

Repeat this process of gentle, kind, curious accepting awareness with the lower part of the left leg, the knee and the upper part of the left leg.

Notice how your left leg may now feel different to your right leg.

Gently shift your awareness around and down the right leg, to the toes in your right foot.

Move your awareness up the right leg in the same way as before. Then let it go.

Become aware of your pelvis, hips, buttocks and all the delicate organs around here.

Breathe into them and imagine you're filling them with nourishing oxygen.

Move up to the lower torso, the lower abdomen and lower back.

Notice the movement of the lower abdomen as you breathe in and out. Notice any emotions you feel here. See if you can explore and accept your feelings as they are.

Bring your attention to your chest and upper back.

Feel your rib cage rising and falling as you breathe in and out. Be mindful of your heart beating if you can. Be grateful that all these vital organs are currently functioning to keep you alive and conscious. Be mindful of any emotions arising from your heart area. Allow space for your emotions to express themselves.

Go to both arms together, beginning with the fingertips and moving up to the shoulders.

Breathe into and out of each body part before you move to the next one, if that feels helpful.

Focus on your neck.

Then move your mindful attention to your jaw, noticing if it's clenched. Feel your lips, inside your mouth, your cheeks, your nose, your eyelids and eyes, your temples, your forehead and checking if it's frowning, the back of your head, and finally the top of your head. Take your time to be with each part of your head in a mindful way.

Imagine a space in the top of your head and soles of your feet.

Imagine your breath sweeping up and down your body as you breathe in and out. Feel the breath sweeping up and down your body, and get a sense of each cell in your body being nourished with energy and oxygen. Continue this for a few minutes.

Now let go of all effort to practice mindfulness.

Get a sense of your whole body. Feel yourself as complete, just as you are. Remember this sense of being is always available to you when you need it. Rest in this stillness.

Acknowledge the time you've taken to nourish your body and mind. Come out of this exercise gently.

Endeavour to bring this mindful awareness to whatever activity you engage in next.

4. Mindfulness - 1 minute exercises

Take some time to practice mindfulness in your day to day life. Follow these short one minute exercises below that you can do anytime and anywhere.-

1. Place your hand on your belly. Take 10 deep breaths and notice your hand moving up and down as you breathe.
2. Close your eyes and think about how you are feeling. Happy? Sad? Mad? Scared? Excited? Something else? Think about how you know you are feeling this way.
3. Sit very still and notice one thing that you can see, hear, feel, taste and smell.
4. Close your eyes and sit quietly. Notice the way that your clothes feel on your body. Notice your shirt, trousers and shoes. Do you notice anything you didn't notice before?
5. Close your eyes and spend one minute thinking about a happy day in your life. Try to remember as much about that day as you can.
6. Sit quietly and place a small object in your hand. A pencil, eraser, or something else. Notice how heavy the object is. Think about what it feels like in your hand. Notice one new thing about this object.

5. Mindful eating – using the five senses

The following exercise will introduce and guide you through a short experience in mindful eating. This is a useful exercise to help introduce you to mindful eating and use all of your senses to be aware of and fully experience the food. If you have a visual or hearing impairment then you may need to approach this exercise slightly differently by focusing on the senses that are most appropriate for you.

Take a single raisin and place it in the palm of your hand and sit down comfortably in an upright position and with your body relaxed'.

Now look at the raisin, experience the raisin using your sight. What does it look like? Bring it close to your eyes and examine every detail; What colour is it? What does the texture look like? Now take the raisin far away from your eyes and observe the difference.

Next touch the raisin and roll the raisin between your fingers; What does it feel like? Rough or smooth, hard or soft; are there any ridges? Is it dry or moist? How does it feel in the palm of your hand? If you find your mind wandering simply notice this and bring it back to this exercise.

Next listen to the raisin; move the raisin around in your fingers; Can you observe any sounds?

Next smell the raisin; bring the raisin close to your nose; How does it smell? Are there any aromas? Does it smell sweet or earthy or has no smell? When you smell do you notice your mouth watering or not? If you find your mind wandering simply notice this and bring it back to this exercise.

Finally put the raisin in your mouth, place it on your tongue, but don't chew it yet; notice how it tastes: is it sweet, sour, tasteless? Try rolling the raisin under your tongue; do you trigger any taste buds here and notice any flavours. Next slowly begin to chew the raisin — how does it feel? What sensations do you feel? Do you notice any thoughts? If so simply notice them but continue your focus on the experience of chewing the raisin. Does the flavour of the raisin change with each chew; what are the tastes you are experiencing? Next slowly swallow the chewed raisin; what is happening after your swallow; can you feel the raisin moving down your oesophagus into your stomach? Is your mouth watering? Notice your thoughts and feelings.

What was your experience like?

What did you notice?

Some people complete this exercise feeling relaxed, happy and satisfied, however others may have felt uncomfortable or negative. Simply observe these feelings without judgement.

Try the exercise with different foods and notice the differences. With practice you will develop intuitive awareness of food.

5. Visualisation

Think of a health goal you want to achieve or a helpful habit that you want to develop. Sit in a relaxed, upright position, and close your eyes.

Now see yourself having achieved this goal or practicing this helpful habit. Use as much colour, sound, sensation and even smell in this mental imagery as you can imagine.

As your future successful self:

1. What do you look like? (pause 10 seconds).
2. What are you doing? (pause 10 seconds).
3. How do you feel? (pause 10 seconds).
4. What are you thinking? (pause 10 seconds).
5. How do you respond to obstacles and challenges? (pause 10 seconds).
6. Experience yourself having achieved your goal or practicing your helpful habit. (10 seconds).

When you are ready, you may open your eyes

How did this exercise make you feel?

How might you implement this in your day to day life?

Practice this every day – a few times a day if you can.

Positive mental focus is essential to achieving your health goals in a healthy way.

For example, if your goal is to lose weight, don't focus on how much weight you want to lose or how you don't want to look. Focus instead on what you want to achieve, the progress that you are making and be self-compassionate and reinforce helpful habits.

This way you remain motivated to reach your weight loss goals.

Chapter 6: Being assertive

You might want to think about your communication style and whether it is helping you get what you want.

Your aim is always to try and make an assertive request for what you want. Acknowledge that you have your feelings and wishes, and so does the person you are making a request to. Try to make your request clearly and politely, respecting the other person. Try to aim for a request like the examples in the green box.

Can you see the problems with the other examples? The worst that can happen is that people say 'no' but that usually gives you a starting point for compromise.

Imagine the following situations:

Scenario 1

You need to change your mealtimes at home so that you can try and bring some more healthy foods into your diet.

Scenario 2

You would like to make sure you have time for exercise at least a couple of evenings a week, but ideally you would like to do it with someone.

Consider what you would do in each scenario. Have a look at the examples on the next page to see the four different ways of managing these two situations below. Always aim to go for the green 'assertive' example.

Passive

- You quietly decide you are going to cook your family their normal meals but you eat something different away from your family.
- You haven't told anyone about the changes you want to make because you feel bad and embarrassed about your weight.

Assertive

- You discuss with your family what you need from them to help you make changes and find a compromise.
- You ask one of your friends (or maybe one of the people you have met on the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme) about doing some exercise together.

Passive aggressive

- You crossly sit at the table eating nothing and make it clear about how tough it is to watch them eat the foods you love.
- You decide to try and do some exercise just at the time when your family would like to watch something on the TV, and it interrupts them.

Aggressive

- You completely change your family's evening meal with no discussion or warning. You throw out all the foods you know are unhealthy and insist your family follow your way.
- You tell your family that it is partly their fault that you have got overweight because you haven't had time to eat and exercise healthily

Consider how being assertive and following the communication style in the green box could help you to reach your goals. Write down and complete the following sentences to identify how you can be more assertive with your goals.

1. The situations I can practice being assertive are?

2. I will practice assertiveness by?

3. Being assertive will help manage my health by?

Additional resources and further reading:

The Assertiveness Workbook, 2013, Dr Dena Mitchell.

The Little Book of Yes, 2018, Noah Goldstein, Steve Martin and Robert Cialdini.
<https://preventing-diabetes.co.uk>

Feedback

Feedback can be given at any stage during the programme via email info@preventing-diabetes.co.uk phone 0333 577 3010, or directly to one of our team.

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