

# *Being in the moment*

Practicing bringing our  
mind back to now



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## *What is this guide?*

This short guide is a resource designed for **all** colleagues at University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust to help support positive wellbeing in the workplace and outside of work.

Regardless of your role, as a member of the Trust you are hugely important to the care of our patients and to the running of a busy city acute Trust.

All of us can struggle at times with how we feel and can **all** get stressed at times.

This guide is one of a series of resources for you to use on your own, which may help you feel as well as you can.

However, if you feel further support would be helpful, please do speak to your Manager or other trusted colleague. Whilst this may not feel easy, it is very normal to struggle at times, and doing something proactive to seek support can be hugely positive. In addition to speaking to your relevant colleague, you can find further information at the back of this guide and on the Trust intranet within the Workplace Wellbeing section of [HRWeb](#).

If you have any difficulty in understanding the content or accessing this resource, please contact [wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk](mailto:wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk)

### *How does this guide work?*

*It can be far more beneficial to our wellbeing to actually change things we are doing rather than just reading about ideas.*

*That is why this guide has a technique within it, which you can practice using the worksheets provided.*

*You may find that the more you do it, the easier it can become to apply.*





## Introduction

How often is your attention focussed on what you are doing?

Think carefully about this question as it is not as straight forward as you might think.

What we mean is the intentional, conscious act of paying attention to what is going on for you in each moment. For example:

When did you last clean your teeth and really focus on the actual act of cleaning your teeth? Focussing on the taste of the mint in your mouth, the sensation of the brush on your teeth, the sound of the bristles moving.

So often in life we find ourselves doing tasks that we have done a thousand times before. Brushing our teeth, having a shower, eating lunch, walking cycling or driving to work, sitting listening to music etc.

What we *usually* do is carry out these tasks in a casual way like we are on autopilot whilst our mind is elsewhere; drifting off onto other thoughts like “what shall I have for dinner?” or “when am I going to have time to tidy the flat?”

We all do this every single day of our lives.

The reality for most of us is that by the time we have one foot out of bed we are already mentally planning what will happen in the day, who we will see, and what conversations need to be had.

This only becomes a problem when we find ourselves constantly ‘living’ in the future or the past. I.e. regardless of what we are doing, our bodies have gone into autopilot whilst our minds either think about the day ahead, or dwell on things that have already happened. This becomes problematic when the thoughts are negative; regretting something we’ve done and playing it over and over in our head, or dreading something coming up and getting anxious thinking about it.



It can be a confusing concept, but when we are dwelling back on past events, or worrying about future events, we are essentially not living in the moment...we are not actually paying attention to the real world that is actually happening **right now!**

**Being in the moment;** paying attention to what is happening to you right now and focussing your attention on it can be a really positive skill to develop, and whilst it might be a simple idea it requires practice to start noticing when we are not doing it.

This is not a new concept. There are many different techniques that people use to help them get better at 'being in the moment', and you might have heard of mindfulness, meditation, tai-chi, guided imagery, yoga and many other activities which tap into this idea of 'being in the moment.'

This guide focusses on a very simple idea which you can try straight away, and use at any point in your life. It is called '4-7-8 breathing'.

But before we look at what it is and how to do it, why should you bother?

## *How does 'being in the moment' help us be well?*

There is evidence to suggest that deep breathing techniques have a positive impact on a person's anxiety and stress levels.

It is suggested that it can help with:

- reducing anxiety
- helping get to sleep
- controlling or reducing feelings of anger

The less we are in the moment, the more we are distracted from what is actually happening to us in life. People often describe truly enjoying experiences when they are 'really living it'.



Things like going to a music concert, eating a favourite meal, walking in nature, swimming in the sea; all of these things are often enjoyed by people because they can take up a person's attention more fully than the day-to-day tasks we grow so used to. And it is when we are fully immersed in an activity that we are not thinking about the past or the future...just what is going on in that specific moment. It doesn't have to be that we can only achieve this positive feeling by doing pleasurable activities however. We can learn to be more present in whatever task we are doing. Mindfulness is a technique which can train you to do this, but takes time and patience to incorporate it successfully into your life. (You can find out more about Mindfulness in the 'Further Support' section of this guide.)

This guide will introduce the idea of being present by looking at a much simpler, quicker technique around your breathing. Whilst it won't have the same benefits of mindfulness, you may find it a very useful tool which sparks your interest in learning more.

### '4-7-8 Breathing'

This technique will sound quite simple. But don't let that put you off trying it. If you are comfortable to do so, just have a go as an experiment and see what you think.

The technique is essentially all about getting you to focus on your breathing by making a conscious change to *how* you are breathing. As much as we might like to think we are excellent multi-taskers, it is actually very difficult to focus your attention on more than one thing. So, if you are fully focussing on your breathing, your mind cannot wander off onto other thoughts; you will be truly in the moment NOW. In a nutshell, the 4-7-8 breathing technique involves the following:

- breathing in for 4 seconds
- holding your breath for 7 seconds
- then exhaling for 8 seconds
- repeat 4 times



## Step by step guide

As mentioned, this calming breathing technique takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere, anytime, (except when driving) and you can do it standing up, sitting in a chair or lying down. But for this first go perhaps take a seat and make yourself as comfortable as you can.

You don't have to close your eyes but can if you wish.

1. First, take a breath in through your nose for 4 seconds, counting in your head
2. Then hold that breath for a count of 7 seconds
3. Exhale through your mouth for 8 seconds
4. repeat the cycle up to 4 times.

**NB:** The total number of seconds that the pattern lasts for is less important than keeping the ratio.

When you have done it, all you have to do is just notice how you feel; perhaps using the questions below if helpful.

## Some considerations

- Was it a pleasant sensation?
- Did you find it helpful in any way at all?
- If it was useful do you think it would be worth trying again?
- When would be useful to do it?
- Would anything get in the way of you doing it again?



## *Breathing difficulties*

If you have any breathing difficulties, you can try a shorter pattern instead, such as:

1. breathe in through the nose for 2 seconds
2. hold the breath for a count of 3 seconds
3. exhale through the mouth for 4 seconds
4. repeat the cycle up to 4 times

However, if you feel uncomfortable or lightheaded try this technique, then stop doing it.

### *Key tip*

- Like most techniques, you should get the most benefit if you do it regularly, and this is more likely if you think of a way to make it part of your daily routine. Finding time to do this two times a day can be a great starting point.





## Further support

- 'Breathe' is a free app for Apple products, which helps people practice the 4-7-8 breathing method. Overall, the app has good reviews from people who have installed it. It also includes a feature to set reminders to use it regularly during the day.
- 'Headspace' is an app you can access on most phones, and has a free version.
- On the NHS website there is information specifically about Mindfulness:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

## Self-help guides

There are other guides in this range available on Connect (staff intranet).



## Reading Well

Reading Well is a scheme where you can access self-help books through the library. It helps employees to understand and manage their health and wellbeing using helpful reading. The books are all endorsed by health experts, as well as people with living with the conditions covered and their relatives and carers (you can view the Reading Well list on Connect). Staff can find the books in the UHB Library (The Education and Research Centre, Level 5).



## Talking therapies

If you feel that you need additional support, then it is readily available free of charge both through the Trust, or externally if you prefer. These services are usually referred to as 'talking therapies'.

Talking therapies are psychological treatments for mental and emotional problems like stress, anxiety and depression. There are lots of different types of talking therapy, but they all involve working with a trained therapist.

This may be one-to-one, in a group, over the phone, with your family, or with your partner. The therapist helps you find answers to the problems you're having. For some problems and conditions, one type of talking therapy may be better than another. Different talking therapies also suit different people.

All employees at UH Bristol are able to access talking therapies through work via Occupational Health, or outside of work through their local IAPT service. There is more detail below on each of these resources, but to explain a little more about different types of talking therapy you can and might like to access:

## Guided self-help

Guided self-help is recommended as a treatment for depression, anxiety and panic disorder.

With guided self-help you work through a CBT-based workbook or computer course with the support of a therapist.

The therapist works with you to understand your problems and make positive changes in your life.

Guided self-help aims to give you helpful tools and techniques that you can carry on using after the course has finished.

During the course your therapist will support you with face-to-face appointments or phone calls.

## Counselling

Counselling is a talking therapy where you talk in confidence to a counsellor. They help you find ways to deal with difficulties in your life.

Counselling on the NHS usually consists of 6 to 12 sessions.



## **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**

The aim of CBT is to help you explore and change how you think about your life, and free yourself from unhelpful patterns of behaviour.

You set goals with your therapist and may carry out tasks between sessions.

A course usually involves around 12 to 20 sessions.

CBT has been shown to work for a variety of mental health problems.

You can enquire further about these different types of support through the following services:

## **Occupational Health**

Avon Partnership Occupational Health Service offer free confidential onsite counselling service. To talk to an advisor or make an appointment, telephone Occupational Health on (0117) 342 3400.

## **IAPT**

Anyone in England can get talking therapies like counselling for depression and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) on the NHS.

Referral can be through individual's GP or they can refer themselves directly to a psychological therapies service. Through IAPT, people can access different types of talking therapies, such as guided self-help, counselling, and CBT amongst others. There is more information below or by going to this website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/types-of-therapy/>

## **Private support**

You may wish to access a service which is private and incurs a cost. The benefits of these services can be a greater flexibility in location, and a reduced waiting time.

You can search for accredited professionals by postcode using the following website: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists>



## **Spiritual, pastoral and bereavement care**

The Healthcare Chaplaincy team provide spiritual care that is equal, just, humane and respectful to staff, patients and their visitors; irrespective of their faith or spiritual tradition. For further information about the services they provide contact [the.chaplaincy@UHBristol.nhs.uk](mailto:the.chaplaincy@UHBristol.nhs.uk) or find further details at <http://connect/Governance/patientexperience/spiritualcare/Pages/default.aspx>

## **Experiencing unacceptable behaviour from others**

All employees have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect, and we all have a responsibility to set a positive example by treating others with respect, and to act in a way which is in line with the Trust's Values. When this doesn't happen, we may benefit from help to sort out the problem.

The first thing to do if you are concerned about the way a colleague is behaving towards to you is to talk to someone about it -

- If you feel you can, speak to the individual and tell them how their behaviour is making you feel.
- Speak to your manager, another manager or a senior colleague and ask them to help you resolve the problem.
- If you have tried all the informal ways of resolving the problem and they haven't worked, the Dignity at Work policy includes information about the formal process. You can contact Employee Services on 0117 34 25000 for support and advice about the policy.
- If the problem is something which can't be resolved in an informal way, or is too serious to resolve in an informal way, please contact: Employee Services and Medical HR- 0117 34 (25000) or Freedom to Speak Up – 0117 34 (22888).





We hope that you have found this guide useful. If you have any feedback on this guide please email [wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk](mailto:wellbeing@uhbristol.nhs.uk)

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