

Summary of Session 7: How Can I Best Take Care of Myself?

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What we actually do with our time from moment to moment, from hour to hour, from one year to the next, can be a very powerful influence affecting our general well-being and our ability to deal skillfully with depression.

You might like to try asking yourself these questions:

- Of the things that I do, what nourishes me, what increases my sense of actually being alive and present rather than merely existing? (Nourishing activities)
- Of things that I do, what drains me, what decreases my sense of actually being alive and present, what makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse? (Draining activities)
- Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I simply cannot change, am I consciously choosing to increase the time and effort I give to nourishing activities and to decrease the time and effort I give to draining activities? Are there activities I used to enjoy that I could incorporate back into my routine?
- Are there attitudinal changes I can bring to my experience when problem solving or other actions are not possible or necessary?

By being actually present in more of our moments and making mindful decisions about what we really need in each of those moments, we use activity to become more aware and alert, and to regulate mood.

This is true for dealing with both the regular pattern of our daily lives and periods of low mood or anxious states that may lead to depression or anxiety—we can use our day-by-day experience to discover and cultivate activities that we can use as tools to cope with periods of worsening mood. Having these tools already available means that we will be more likely to persist with them in the face of negative thoughts such as “Why bother with anything?” or “What if this never changes?” that are simply part of the territory of depressed or anxious states.

For example, one of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to engage in daily physical exercise—as a minimum, aim for three brisk, 10 minute walks a day and also, if at all possible, other type of exercise, such as mindful stretching, yoga, swimming, jogging, and so on. Once exercise is in your daily routine, it is a readily available response to depressed or anxious moods as they arise.

The Breathing Space provides a way to remind us to use activity to deal with unpleasant feelings as they show up.

USING THE BREATHING SPACE: THE ACTION STEP

After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the breathing space, it may feel appropriate to take some considered action. In dealing with depressed feelings the following activities may be particularly helpful:

- Do something pleasurable.
- Do something that will give you a sense of satisfaction or mastery.
- Act mindfully.
- Ask yourself: What, if anything, do I need for myself right now? How can I best take care of myself right now?

Try some of the following:

Do something pleasurable.

Be kind to your body: Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food without feeling guilty; have your favourite hot drink; give yourself a facial or manicure.

Engage in enjoyable activities: Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend), visit a friend, do your favorite hobby; do some gardening; get some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good.

Do something that gives you a sense of mastery, satisfaction, achievement, or control.

Clean the house; clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with letter writing; do some work; pay a bill; do something that you have been putting off doing; do some exercise (It's especially important to congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or part of a task and to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time).

Act mindfully.

Focus your entire attention on just what you are doing right now; keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g., "Now I am walking down the stairs...now I can feel the banister beneath my hand...now I'm walking into the kitchen...now I'm turning on the light..."); be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your feet with the floor as you walk.

Remember:

Try to perform your action as an experiment. Try not to bias how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

Consider a range of activities and don't limit yourself to a favorite few. Sometimes, trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself. "Exploring" and "inquiring" often work against "withdrawal" and "retreat."

Don't expect miracles. Try to carry out what you have planned as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting this to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic. Rather, activities are helpful in building your overall sense of control in the face of shifts in your mood.

WHEN DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY IS OVERWHELMING

Sometimes you may find that "depression" or "anxiety" comes out of the blue. For example, you may wake up feeling very tired and listless, with hopeless thoughts going through your mind. Perhaps you find yourself worrying about a problem. Alternatively, you may experience physical sensations reminiscent of acute depression or anxiety.

When this happens, it may be useful for you to tell yourself, “Just because I am depressed now does not mean that I have to stay depressed.” It also doesn’t mean you are clinically depressed. Not all sadness is depression. Not all anxious thoughts are a disorder.

When things come out of the blue like this, they set off negative ways of thinking in everyone.

If you have been depressed or anxious in the past, it will tend to trigger old habits of thought that may be particularly damaging: full of overgeneralizations, predictions that this will go on forever, catastrophic thinking, and “back to square one” thinking. All of these ways of making sense of what is happening to you will tend to undermine your taking any action.

Having these symptoms does not mean that it needs to go on for a long time or that you are already in a full blown episode of depression or anxiety.

Ask yourself, “What can I do to look after myself to get me through this difficult period?”

Take a breathing space to help gather yourself. This may help you see your situation from a wider perspective. This wider perspective allows you to become aware of both the pull of the old habits of thinking and what skillful action you might take.

HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK FOLLOWING SESSION 7

1. From all the different forms of formal mindfulness practice you have experienced (practices on the CD, mindfulness of breath/body without the CD, etc.), settle on a form of practice that you intend to use on a regular, daily basis for the next 5 weeks. Use this practice on a daily basis this week, and record your reactions.
2. 3-Minute Breathing Space—Regular: Practise three times a day at times that you have decided in advance. Record each time you do it by circling an R for the appropriate day on the Form; note any comments/difficulties.
3. 3-Minute Breathing Space—Responsive/Coping plus Action: Practise whenever you notice unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Record each time you do the Responsive/Coping breathing space; note any comments/difficulties.

HOME PRACTICE RECORD FORM—SESSION 7

Record on the Home practice Record each time you practise. Make a note of what comes up in the practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	
Date:	RP 3 3 3 RC	

* Practices to record: Regular Practice (RP), Three Minute Breathing Space (3), and Responsive/Coping Breathing Space (RC).

Nourishing and Depleting Exercise

NOTICING THE LINKS BETWEEN ACTIVITY AND MOOD

Bring to mind what you do during a typical day. And what about evenings and weekends? What sort of things do you find yourself doing then?

Now see if you can divide the list into (1) those things that lift your mood, give you energy, nourish you, (2) those things that dampen your mood or are depleting and (3) those activities that you experience as neutral. You may find that the same activity may be nourishing in one context, depleting in another or even neutral depending upon your state. Beside each activity put an **N** for nourishing, a **D** for depleting or a **o** for neutral.

Activity	N, D or o

Take a moment to see what you notice.

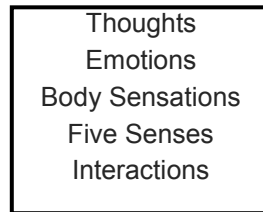
- Is there a way to bring a different attitude to those activities that are depleting or perhaps find a way to do less of them?
- Is there a way to bring more of the nourishing activities into daily life or decrease the depleting ones?

Write down a small task in the service of this change that you can do in the next 24-48 hours. Make sure the task is small, manageable, concrete, stated positively, and has a defined beginning and end.

MY TASK:

How the Mind Perpetuates Suffering

INITIAL EXPERIENCE



(positive, negative, neutral)



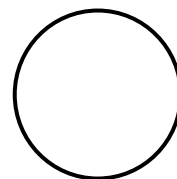
THE MIND RUNS WITH IT

I/They/It shouldn't ...
What if ... happens
If this continues ...
My life is ...
This pain will ...
I'm such a ...
What if ...
Here we go again ...
This will never stop ...



Suffering

Suffering



Suffering

Suffering

How Mindfulness Helps to Reduce Suffering

INITIAL EXPERIENCE

Thoughts
Emotions
Body Sensations
Five Senses
Interactions

(positive, negative, neutral)



MINDFULNESS

(Bringing awareness, openness, acceptance to the initial experience ... allowing it to be as it is. Helps to short-circuit the snowball effect and, over time, enables one to work more skilfully with the initial experience and to live more in the present)



THE MIND RUNS WITH IT

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Suffering
Suffering
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