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## **MBSR Week 4**

### **Managing Stress with Mindfulness**



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### **Learning to Respond Rather Than React in Stressful Situations**

Difficult things are part of life. It is how we handle them that determine the extent to which they rule our lives. We can learn to relate more lightly to them. By becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events, we can free ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting and, instead, mindfully respond in more skilful ways.

In order to respond, rather than react, we need awareness. Our bodies, with all their present-moment feelings and sensations, are an invaluable anchor for that awareness. They are always there to return to, enabling us to remain focussed in the present moment.

We will discuss about the physiological and psychological bases of stress reactivity, and experience mindful strategies for responding in positive, proactive ways to stressful situations.

### **Home practice – week 4**

1. Practice on alternate days mindful **yoga** and the **body scan**.
2. Practice **sitting meditation** with awareness of breathing for **5 minutes** per day.
3. Be aware of stress reactions (physical, behavioural, mental and emotional) during the day without trying to change them.
4. Read additional documents.

**My best wishes for week 4!**



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### Homework Record Form – week 4

Record on the Homework Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the homework, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Comments
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	

## What Is Stress?

### There Are Reasons We Experience Stress

Stress is a physical expression of our Fight or Flight+survival mechanism. A threatening situation will trigger a stress response, which prepares us to confront or flee a possible danger. This helps for immediate danger but unfortunately the stress response is also triggered by tense situations where physical action is not an option, such as unreasonable boss, heavy traffic, or financial problems.

### Two types of stress

1. Acute - Acute stress prepares us for fight or flight, and is generally short-term.
2. Chronic . Chronic stress is long term and is the main cause of stress-related health problems.

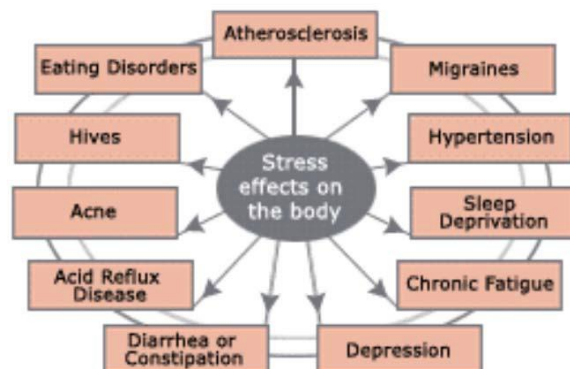
Stress causes chemical changes in the body that, left unchecked, can have negative effects on both mental and physical health. High levels of stress contribute to health issues as diverse as depression, insomnia, heart disease, skin disorders and headaches.

### Acute Stress

Acute stress is a short-term response by the body's sympathetic nervous system. How long acute stress lasts may vary- the response can last for a few minutes or a few weeks. During an acute stress response, the adrenal medulla (part of the adrenal glands, two small glands located on top of each kidney) begins to release catecholamine hormones (including adrenaline and noradrenaline). In all, over seventeen different hormones are released during an acute stress response.

### Physical responses

- blood sugar levels rise
- additional red blood cells are released
- peripheral blood vessels constrict
- pulse quickens
- blood pressure rises
- digestion stops



### Chronic Stress

Chronic stress occurs when continuous acute stress responses keep the body on alert continuously, negatively affecting health. The ongoing stress response causes the hypothalamus and pituitary gland (portions of the brain) to release a chemical known as ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone). ACTH, known as the stress hormone+stimulates the adrenal gland to produce and release cortisol.

Cortisol is one of the hormones associated with waking and sleeping. When chronic stress stimulates cortisol production, the daily cycle of cortisol levels is disrupted. High levels of cortisol may occur at night. This can result in insomnia. Imbalances of cortisol and other stress-related hormones weaken health over time and the effects are not immediately seen. Practicing stress management techniques can help minimize the effects of stress on your health

## STRESS – WARNING SIGNALS

<b>Physical symptoms:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches / migraines</li> <li>• Digestive problems: indigestion, upset stomach, stomach pain</li> <li>• Appetite and weight changes</li> <li>• Sweaty hands</li> <li>• Sleep disorders . changing in sleep patterns</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Visible tension or trembling</li> <li>• Premenstrual syndrome, erectile dysfunction, lowered libido</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint and back pain</li> <li>• Tension in the neck area</li> <li>• Tension in the shoulder area</li> <li>• Heart palpitations (tachycardia)</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Chest or throat pain</li> <li>• Constantly feeling cold</li> <li>• Vulnerability to infections</li> <li>• More frequent colds and flus</li> </ul>
<b>Symptoms on the level of behaviour:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive smoking / drinking</li> <li>• Using recreational drugs</li> <li>• Unrestrained gum chewing</li> <li>• Overly critical attitude</li> <li>• Dictatorial behaviour</li> <li>• Teeth grinding during sleep</li> <li>• Uncontrolled eating behaviour</li> <li>• Inability to complete tasks / Uncharacteristic errors</li> <li>• Over-reactions to problems / situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restlessness</li> <li>• Lateness (leaving early or extended lunches)</li> <li>• Working far longer hours</li> <li>• Increased sickness absence</li> <li>• Intense or obsessive activity</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Disruptive or antisocial behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Symptoms on the emotional level:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nervousness, anxiety</li> <li>• Boredom, nothing is of importance</li> <li>• Irritability . just about to explode</li> <li>• Mood changes</li> <li>• Feeling of powerlessness</li> <li>• Tearfulness</li> <li>• Feeling low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling under pressure</li> <li>• Frequent outbursts of anger</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Unfounded unhappiness</li> <li>• Quickly offended . increased sensitivity</li> </ul>
<b>Symptoms on the mental level:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No clarity of thought</li> <li>• Lack of creativity</li> <li>• Impaired ability to remember</li> <li>• No sense of humour</li> <li>• Distraction or confusion</li> </ul>	<p>Inability to decide Illogical or irrational thought process Impulse to run away Excessive forgetfulness</p>

Source: German Institute for Mindfulness



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## Exhaustion Funnel

In the book *Mindfulness. Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, Prof. Mark Williams and Denny Penman discuss the idea of the exhaustion funnel (see image below) to describe how we are pulled into the dark pit of burnout when we fail to care for our own psychological /emotional needs. The concept was developed by Prof. Marie Åsberg, expert on burnout, at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

The Exhaustion Funnel, from William and Penman (2011)



The top circle represents how we are when we lead a balanced and healthy life. As things get busier Williams and Penman notice, many of us tend to give things up to focus on what seems important. The circle narrows, illustrating the narrowing of our lives. But if the stress is still there, we give up more and more. The circles narrow further. Notice that very often, the very first things we give up are those that nourish us the most but seem optional. The result is that we are increasingly left with only work or other stressors that often deplete our resources, and nothing to replenish or nourish us (Williams and Penman, 2011: p. 212). Burnout is then the result. The authors highlight how it is often committed and conscientious people, and those whose level of self-confidence is closely dependent on their work-performance who are likely to burnout.

## Enough

Enough. These few words are enough.  
If not these words, this breath.  
If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to the life  
we have refused  
again and again  
until now.  
Until now .

David Whyte, *Where Many Rivers Meet*