

The Mind/Body Connection: An Overview

This program introduces safe, simple meditation techniques, deep breathing methods, and basic standing and seated stretching exercises. This program will introduce you to physical activities and flexibility exercises and you will learn how to release stress and tension when needed.

Program Goal

To apply research-based information on the mind/body connection and assess how you are affected by and manage stress — physically and emotionally.

Program Objectives

- Describe some physical activities that help you reach and maintain good health, physical condition, and function.
- Understand some of the negative effects of stress.
- Learn various ways to control stress.
- Practice basic meditation and deep breathing, as well as standing and seated stretches and balance exercises.

The Mind/Body Connection, What Does It Mean For You?

Your body responds to the way you think, feel, and act. This is the “mind/body connection.”

- Individuals with good emotional health are aware of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. They have learned healthy ways to cope with the stress and problems that are a normal part of life.
- People who are always stressed, anxious and/or upset may not have learned how to handle some of the stresses in life. They may begin feeling ill and even may have physical symptoms such as muscle spasms or ulcers. These changes could be the body trying to tell them that something is not right.

Physical Activity Guidelines from the U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services

All adults should be active. For good health you should do **at least:**

- 30 minutes, five days a week (2 hours and 30 minutes a week) of moderate-intensity exercise. Some examples of moderate intensity activities are: walking, light jogging, and light bicycling.

OR

This publication is part of a series on **The Mind/Body Connection**.

Other publications in this series are:

HSW-AP.003 The Mind/Body Connection: Introduction and Safe Exercise Practice for Adults

HSW-AP.004 The Mind/Body Connection: Deep Breathing and Simple Meditation

HSW-AP.005 The Mind/Body Connection: Basic Standing and Seated Stretching Exercises

HSW-AP.006 The Mind/Body Connection: Beginner Level Balance and Standing Stretches

- 20 minutes, four days a week (1 hour and 15 minutes a week) of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Some examples of vigorous physical activities are: running, swimming laps, and aerobics.

OR

- A combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity activities.

If you cannot do 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week of moderate-intensity activity because of a chronic condition be as physically active as possible.

If you are at risk for falling, do exercises that maintain or improve balance.

ACTIVITY: DEEP BREATHING WARM-UP EXERCISE

Use this breathing practice to prepare the mind and body for additional exercise.

1. Place your hands on your stomach and take a deep breath.
2. Feel your hands move out as you take breath in.
3. Exhale and feel your hands return to the rest position.
4. Start with 3 to 5 breaths and increase to 8 to 12 breaths, as appropriate.

Health benefits of exercise and physical activity for adults include:

- Healthy weight goals
- Muscular fitness
- Heart and lung fitness
- Prevention of falls
- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Clear thinking
- Lower risk of some chronic disease

Safe Exercise Principles for Special Situations:

For Adults with Chronic Medical Conditions

- People with chronic disease should be under the regular care of a healthcare professional. In talking with their health care provider, they can create a physical activity plan that is right for them. Adults should talk to their healthcare provider about starting exercise safely.

For Adults with Disabilities

- The data shows that regular physical activity provides health benefits for people with disabilities. Adults with disabilities should talk with their healthcare provider to develop a physical activity plan.

For Women during and After Pregnancy

- Women who are pregnant and postpartum should discuss their level of activity with their healthcare provider. Moderate-intensity physical activity is usually safe for women with uncomplicated pregnancies.

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office and request the publication, **The Mind/Body Connection: Introduction and Safe Exercise Practice for Adults** (HSW-AP.003).

Stress Overview

There are many things that cause stress. Examples include children living away from home, money problems, health issues (both personal and family), death of a loved one, and other similar life situations.

ACTIVITY: WHAT STRESSES YOU OUT?

Take a moment to think about how your body reacts to stressful situations. Does your heart rate increase? Do you clench your jaw muscles or make your hands into fists? Each person reacts differently to stress; the first step to beginning to control your stress level, is to find out what your stressors are.

1. Reflect for a few minutes on what causes you the most stress in your daily life.
2. Write down three to five things that cause you stress. (You will not be sharing these with anyone; this is only for your benefit.)
3. Be specific. If finances are a big source of stress, describe the details. For example: "I get stressed out when I do not have money to buy groceries at the end of the month" instead of just "money problems."
4. Prioritize your list. List the item that causes you the most stress first and so on. You may begin to relieve your stress by realizing what is causing it.

Meditation Overview

Meditation may produce greater calmness, physical relaxation and psychological (mind/body) balance. In meditation, you learn to focus attention. You can use meditation for help with various health problems including anxiety, pain, depression, stress and sleeplessness. Meditation is also helpful for maintaining overall health and well-being.

Four elements common to most meditation methods:

- quiet location
- specific, comfortable posture
- focus of attention, such as a candle or other object
- open attitude

ACTIVITY: MINDFUL CHECK-IN/A MINDFULNESS BASED STRESS REDUCTION MEDITATION

Take a few moments to be still. Sit in a comfortable position. Congratulate yourself for taking this time for meditation practice.

Begin this mindful check-in by feeling into your body and mind, allowing any waves of thought, emotion, or physical sensation to just be. Perhaps this is the first break you have taken amidst your busy day. As you begin to enter the world of being rather than doing, you may notice the trajectory of the feelings that you have been carrying within yourself. There is no need to judge, analyze, or figure things out. Just allow yourself to be in the here and now, amidst everything that is present in this moment. Close your eyes.

Spend about three minutes checking in with yourself in this way. As you come to the end of this mindful check-in, again congratulate yourself for doing this practice and directly contributing to your health and well-being.

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Deep Breathing Overview

Deep breathing may be able to reduce stress as well. It involves inhaling and exhaling deeply, taking even lengths of in breaths and out breaths. This exercise can be done almost anywhere and several times during the day, whenever you feel stressed. Deep breathing may cause sleepiness or light headedness. If you feel these, stop deep breathing and return to your normal breathing rate.

Deep Breathing Is Widely Recommended To Help With The Following Conditions:

- symptoms of menopause including sleeplessness and hot flashes
- cancer treatment side effects
- pain control
- anxiety disorder symptoms
- stress management
- quitting smoking

ACTIVITY: DEEP BREATHING WITH ARM MOVEMENTS

1. Take in a very full, slow, deep breath through your nose.
2. As you breathe in, gradually raise your arms high over your head.
3. Exhale through your mouth, softly making the sound *Ahhh*. As you breathe out, lower your arms, letting your whole body relax.
4. Repeat three times.

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office and request the publication **The Mind/Body Connection: Deep Breathing and Simple Meditation** (HSW-AP.004)

Basic Standing and Seated Stretching Exercises

The American College of Sports Medicine suggests that adults should include flexibility exercises in their regular exercise. Stretching may help develop and maintain range of motion in the body's joints. ACSM also suggests that adults should stretch 2 to 3 days a week.

Stretching Exercise Safety

It is best to do stretching exercises after you do strength or cardio (endurance) exercises such as walking or resistance-band training. If stretching is the only type of exercise you do, always warm up first by doing some deep breathing, walking in place with arm motion and/or arm circles, for about five minutes.

Stretching Safely: Tips From the National Institute on Aging

- Stretching should not be painful. If while moving into a stretch you feel pain you are stretching too far. Ease up from the stretch so that it no longer hurts.
- Mild discomfort or a mild pulling feeling is normal.
- Slowly move into position and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Relax, then repeat, trying to stretch farther.
- Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain and hold the stretch while you breathe. Relax, then repeat.
- Remember to BREATHE; do not hold your breath in a stretch.
- If you have had a hip replacement, check with your doctors before doing any lower body exercises, including stretches.

Before you begin seated exercises, be sure that you are sitting with proper posture.

Locate a chair that will fit your body. You should be able to:

- sit with your body weight evenly distributed on both hips
- keep your knees bent at a right angle, at the same level or a little higher than your hips
- have your feet flat on the ground

ACTIVITY: UPPER BODY SEATED STRETCHES

Side Bend Neck Stretch

1. Tilt head to one side, bringing ear towards shoulder.
2. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds while breathing normally.
3. Relax, then repeat on other side.



Side Bend Neck Stretch

Shoulder Shrug

1. While inhaling, slowly bring your shoulders up to your ears and hold for approximately 3 seconds.
2. Exhale and rotate shoulders back and down.
3. Repeat 3 times

ACTIVITY: LOWER BODY SEATED STRETCHES

Foot Rotation

1. While sitting in correct posture slowly rotate each foot at the ankle while breathing normally.
2. Rotate each ankle 3 times in one direction, then 3 times in the opposite direction.
3. Relax; repeat once on each side.



Foot Rotation

Seated Forward Bend

Note: If you have had hip or back surgery, do not do this exercise without first talking with your health care provider.

1. Sit securely toward the front of your chair with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Slowly bend forward from your hips; keep your back and neck straight.
3. Relax your neck and lower your chin.

4. Slowly bend farther forward and slide your hands down your legs toward your shins.
5. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort.
6. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds then straighten up slowly all the way to the starting position.
7. Repeat 3 times.



Seated Forward Bend

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office and request the publication **The Mind/Body Connection: Basic Standing and seated Stretching Exercises** (HSW-AP.005).

Beginner Level Balance and Standing Stretches

Before you begin, please check that you are standing with proper posture:

- Shoulders are back and chest is forward
- Head is upright and straight
- Stomach is tucked in, without tilting the pelvis forward or back
- Feet are hips width apart; legs are straight down from the hip

This posture should feel natural not stiff. Try to stay relaxed while holding your body in good posture. Begin all standing exercises in this correct posture.

ACTIVITY: EXERCISE TO IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN BALANCE

Side Stepping

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Step your left foot to the left, then step your right foot to the left, next to your left foot.
3. Step your right foot back to the right, then step your left foot to match your right foot.
(Left, together. Right, together. Left, together. Right, together. This is one repetition.)
4. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
5. Repeat 5 times.

ACTIVITY: STANDING STRETCHING EXERCISES TO IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY

Touch Elbows Stretch

This exercise helps with chest/back flexibility and torso range of motion.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Bring your arms up and out to the sides parallel with the floor.
3. Bend your elbows and touch your fingertips to your shoulders.
4. Raise elbows to shoulder level.
5. Gently move your elbows together toward your body's midline.
6. Try to get elbows as close to each other as possible while still remaining comfortable.
7. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
8. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds.
9. Release by slowly bringing your elbows back out to the side, unfold your arms and allow them to drop down.



Touch Elbows Stretch

Standing Torso Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Place your hands on your hips.
3. Inhale and stand up tall.
4. Exhale and keeping your hips facing forward twist your torso to the right.
5. While in the twist, turn your head to look over the right shoulder.
6. Hold for 3 seconds.
7. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
8. Relax and face forward.
9. Repeat, twisting torso to the left and looking over the left shoulder.



Standing Torso Stretch

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office and request the publication **The Mind/Body Connection: Beginner Level Balance and Standing Stretches** (HSW-AP.006).

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