

Stress and Your Body

With life being so busy nowadays, so many things to do, responsibilities and an endless bombardment of news and negativity, it is easy to become stressed.

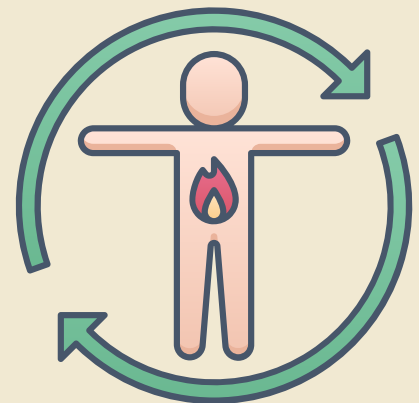
When you have a family member who is struggling with alcohol or substance dependency, this can bring about even more stress. With so much worry about the situation, it is easy to ignore our own well being. Focusing on your own health during these times is paramount.

How does stress affect your body?

When stressed, the brain triggers a flight or fight response—this floods the body with hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Your heart can beat faster, your breathing can become shallow, your digestion can be affected and so much more. Your nervous system becomes dysregulated. You can feel ungrounded with feelings of: **not being able to think straight, anxiety, distraction, panic, lightheadedness, shallow breathing and so on.** Below are a few things that may help...

Mindfulness

Most of the time people are thinking about what's to come or what's happened. Being in the actual moment means that you are fully present and helps the body relax and heal. Sounds easy but often the mind will wander... if you can't manage it, it doesn't matter, the more you practice the easier it becomes. The only bad mindfulness is one you don't try to do.



Try the **5-4-3-2-1 method**. At any time of day, stop and notice **5** things you can see, **4** things you can touch, **3** things you can hear, **2** things you can smell and **1** thing you can taste.

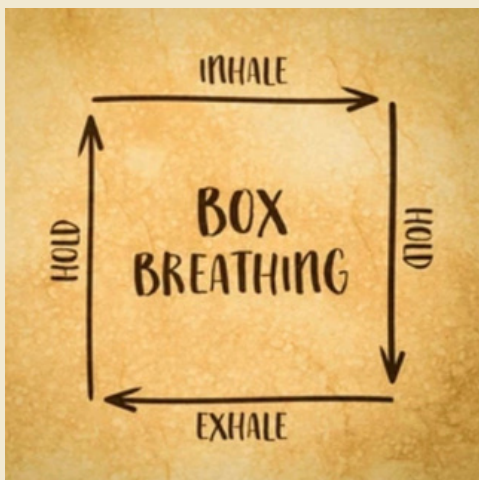
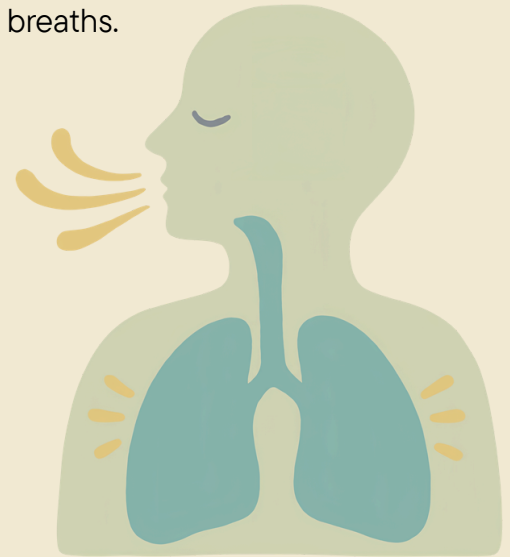
Try a **body scan**. Starting from the top of your head to the toes, move your mental focus slowly through your body and notice any tension held. When you notice tension, wait at that point and give permission for the body to let it go.

Try **mindful eating**. Notice the smell, texture and the taste of every bite of food. Mindfulness can be used in all areas of your life, such as mindful walking. When you are present in the moment, your mind cannot focus on worries.

Try **breathwork**. When we are born, we naturally breathe into the abdomen. If you watch a baby, you will see this. Over the years, we tend to breathe more into the upper chest, this makes it easier to suffer anxiety as we are not taking full, slow breaths.

Here are some **breathwork ideas**:

Place your hand on your upper chest and bring your attention to your breath. Inhale slowly through your nose whilst silently counting to six and then slowly exhale for six through your mouth. Repeat this several times and throughout the day.



Box Breathing

Imagine a box and as you inhale slowly, imagine going across the top, then hold your breath as you imagine going down the side. Then exhale as you imagine going across the bottom, hold again as you imagine going up the side before inhaling as you imagine going across the top. Repeat the cycle for between six and 10 rounds.

Full Breath

Find yourself a comfortable place to rest, either sitting or lying. Slow your breathing down and concentrate on the three parts of your breath. As you breathe into the abdomen first, it will rise, then expand into the sides of your ribcage and finally breathe into the upper part of your chest. As you breathe out, reverse the order. The air goes from the upper chest first, then the sides of the ribcage and then the abdomen to finish. Repeat this cycle for a few minutes at a time and you will find that you feel much more relaxed.

Walking Outside

Try to take the opportunity to walk outside whenever possible. Walking in nature helps our nervous system de-stress. Use the time to observe your immediate environment, trees, grass, flowers etc. and allow yourself to focus on the here and now, not on what you have to do later on in the day.

Finally, during these difficult times, remember to show yourself compassion.