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## Mindfulness: Reduce Stress Through Breathwork Exercises, Meditation, and Movement

Mindfulness is the practice of self-awareness, being fully present, and paying attention on purpose to our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and environment with acceptance and without judgment. There are many benefits to mindfulness including effective stress management that then helps to improve physical and mental health. Making a decision to stay present in the moment- choosing not to focus on the past or an imagined future – can reduce unproductive and anxious thoughts that exacerbate stress. Here are three simple mindfulness practices to help relieve distressing thoughts and thought patterns:

- **Breathwork:** Use breathing techniques to intentionally change your breathing pattern to promote a state of calm and relaxation. Three simple techniques include
  - Abdominal breathing – slow, deep breaths from the abdomen for one minute
  - Box breathing – pattern of inhaling, holding, exhaling, holding for four counts each
  - Body scan breathing – in a comfortable position, first focus your breathing to be slow and deep and then move your attention to parts of your body. You can begin at the toes and move upward to your head or from the head downward to your toes. When you notice areas of pressure or tension, try purposely contracting the area with an inhale breath of four counts and then relax the area on your exhale breath for four counts.
- **Mindfulness meditation:** a centering, individual, introspective application that involves a dual focus on the mind and body to promote a sense of calmness and relaxation.
  - Seek a quiet location with minimal distractions
  - Choose a specific, comfortable posture -seated, standing, or lying down
  - Concentrate your attention using a breathing pattern, a candle or sounds of beach waves
  - Choose an open attitude- focus on the experience and not expectations
- **Mindful movement:** bringing the practice of mindfulness to acts of physical activity. Before movement or exercise, draw the mind to the physical activity and focus on connecting the mind to the movement, instead of just going through the motion of the activity. Pay attention to the flow that happens in your body when exercising and the unity that exists between the mind, body, and breath. Some types of mindful movement are
  - Walking - Being outdoors and choosing to observe with a beginner's mind or a childlike wonder. Experience the awe of the nature around you.
  - Yoga- Stretching poses, breathing exercises and meditation practices used in yoga have been shown through research to benefit the body in increased strength and flexibility, better balance and coordination, improved reaction times, better lung function, heightened cardiovascular conditioning and weight loss.
  - Tai Chi or Qigong- these Chinese practices use various techniques such as breath work, posture, guided imagery and/or meditations; and can potentially reduce stress by promoting balance, relaxation, and improved mood.