
INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Relaxing your mind

Thinking is the most important part of the stress response. Worrying thoughts trigger off the “fight or flight” response. Thinking worrying thoughts can become a habit and they are rarely helpful – just distressing.

Relaxing your mind is important because worrying thoughts make it difficult to relax physically. Relaxing your mind can also reduce pain, nausea and other physical symptoms.

It may be useful to imagine the brain as a muscle which is exercised in a certain way. If you cycled to work every day, you would find you could do this without much effort. Whereas, if you had to run to work one day instead, it is likely you would find it hard work and your legs would ache. This is because you wouldn't be used to exercising your body in that way. The brain is similar. If we constantly “exercise” the worry part of our brains, we can end up worrying much of the time, without trying to, or even being aware we are doing it.

The following ideas can “train” your brain by exercising the calming part. Like running, these exercises may take a huge effort at first, but with perseverance, the exercises will become easier and you should feel the benefits.

The exercises involve relaxing and creating positive, calming images in your mind. The theory is that if you practise imagining a relaxing scene, you will begin to feel more relaxed. If you imagine feeling more energised, you will begin to feel more energised.

How to do it

1. Imagine yourself somewhere else, for example, lying on a beach in the sun, absorbing the warmth and energy. Imagine looking out over your favourite place in the countryside, enjoying the peace and the fresh air. Whatever you choose, imagine all the colours, sounds and smells...warmth or breeze. Go through each of your five senses in turn, thinking about what you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste.
2. You might choose to imagine your immune system becoming energized, or areas which are painful being cooled and soothed.
3. If you are worried by distracting thoughts, imagine your worries as bubbles in a glass of fizzy water. Let yourself relax as the bubbles rise to the surface and burst. You could think of your worries as clouds or balloons, floating into the air and out of sight.

Or you could imagine your worries are traffic passing you as you stand on the pavement. You notice they are there, but just watch them come and go.

4. Do not worry if you find these exercises difficult. Not everyone finds using their imagination in this way either easy or useful.
5. If it is hard to imagine yourself in a situation, try focusing on the present moment as a way of stilling your thoughts. Concentrate on using your five senses to think about what you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste right now. If you notice worrying thoughts coming into your head, or your mind starting to drift onto other things, don't give yourself a hard time, or give up on the exercise. Just gently bring your mind back to the present moment.

Further sources of information

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. Stating a web address does not imply we endorse a particular site. Neither does not stating a web address imply lack of endorsement.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The PALS team is available to help with any of your comments, compliments or concerns and will ensure a prompt and efficient service. Contact details:

- King's Mill Hospital **01623 672222**
(out of hours answer phone)
Email: Pals.kmh@sfh-tr.nhs.uk
- Newark Hospital **01636 685692**
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If you need this information in a different language or format, please contact PALS, as above.

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