



Introduction

Stress is an unavoidable feature of modern life, and prolonged exposure to stress impairs many of the body's functions. Handling stressors involves development of outer and inner resources for dealing with them. Meditation and mindfulness help you to develop your inner resources in two main ways:

- (1) providing an oasis of calm and relaxation in which we can recuperate;
- (2) teaching you how to perceive clearly what's going on and how we feel. When we encounter stress, we don't act out and we don't suppress it – we simply remain aware without judgment. Mindfulness centred on the body helps to identify and alleviate stress and works on many deep levels. Hence we can learn to change our response to stressors.

In this session

In this session we have introduced the following concepts:

- Stress – “the non-specific response of the organism to any pressure or demand” (Hans Selye).
- Stressors – external (work, relationships, etc.) and internal (thoughts, feelings, etc.). Some stressors are good!
- The classical stress reaction – three stages: (1) fight or flight (immediate survival under threat); (2) slower resistance action (escape the situation); (3) exhaustion (rest and recovery)
- Prolonged stress impairs digestive system, reproductive system, suppresses the immune system, leads to burn out, breakdown, depression, etc.
- Response to stress – the “ultimate effect on our health of the total psychological stress we experience depends in large measure on how we come to perceive change itself in all its various forms, and how skilful we are in adapting to continual change while maintaining our own inner balance and sense of coherence” (Jon Kabat-Zin).
- Awareness allows us to move from an unconscious stress reaction to a conscious stress response.
- Bodyscan meditation: Choice to practise in sitting posture.

Commitment

Committing to 20-30 minutes of practice every day for the duration of this course, including still meditation, writing a meditation diary, movement practices, and daily mindfulness exercises.



Homework

Practice body scan meditation once a day and note down your experiences in your meditation diary. Take a few minutes each day to note down stressors – events that have caused your stress

Body scan meditation reminder

Practice lying down, on your back or on your side, spine long and straight. Centre your awareness on the breathing in your belly. Bring your attention to the crown of your head; just becoming aware of any feelings or sensations there, without judgment about what you find, and without trying to change anything or do anything.

Move your awareness down your body in the following order: face, head, neck, shoulders, upper torso, upper arms, lower torso & abdomen, lower arms, hips and pelvis, hands, upper legs, knees, lower legs, ankles, feet. Then return your awareness to the top of your head and let your attention sweep down through your body faster and more easily.

Now allow your awareness to be generalised through your whole body, particularly being aware of any places that feel uncomfortable, tense, stressed, or anything that's not quite 100%. Allow these areas to be held in your gentle, curious presence.