



WEEK FOUR



WHAT is STRESS?

Recognizing Aversion

“A particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being.” - R. Lazarus



To move to greater levels of health & well-being, we have to start from where we actually are today, in this moment, not from where we would like to be.

So, looking closely at our symptoms & our feelings about them & coming to accept them as they are is of utmost importance.

*In this light,
symptoms of illness or distress, plus your feelings about them, can be viewed as messengers coming to tell you something important about your body or your mind.”*

~ (Jon Kabat Zinn)

Overview of Session 4- Recognizing Aversion

Stress is as old as mankind and inseparable from life. It is part and parcel of our adaptation to our surroundings. Stress is neither good nor bad and cannot be completely eliminated, nor should one seek to do so. It can be a warning signal that moves us to certain actions which can be either constructive or destructive.



It is not unusual to experience stress and anxiety at certain times in our lives- It is how we handle these things that makes the difference between whether they RULE or control our lives, or whether we can relate more lightly to them. In matter of fact becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings & body sensations evoked by events gives us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting so that we can instead mindfully respond in more skilful ways. (Segal et al, 2013)

Image: Mindfulorg.com



Our reactions are immediate (directed by habitual automatic mental patterns) & take the form of 3 reactions –

- **Wanting/Attachment:** We want to hold onto this experience/relationship just as it is - we grasp it & try to keep it like this. Or wishing we were having experiences we want rather than what we are in fact experiencing in our current reality.
- **Not Wanting/Aversion:** – We really don't want whatever is happening now to be happening and we try to get rid of this experience. Children will often cover their eyes and ears and shake their heads in a refusal to face something they don't want to face, and as adults we often do something similar, but it's not so overt! We avoid our experience, deny it, pretend it's not happening, or we get very angry, frustrated or irritated with it.
- **Indifference/Neutral** – we really don't notice what's happening right now at all. This is the case when we are on automatic pilot, lost in planning the future or going over the past, and missing what is right here, right now. This is why we often don't appreciate the good things in our lives until they are no longer there.

Each of these ways of reacting to our experience can cause problems as we are reacting out of unawareness- Our task is not to prevent these natural reactions (that's not possible, they arise naturally) but we can begin to notice them- If we notice this pull of wanting (attachment) and the push of not wanting (Aversion) we can pause, make a space and decide how best to respond. **AWARENESS is the first vital step towards responding mindfully.**

SITTING MEDITATION & BREATHING SPACE:

Practicing Sitting meditation daily offers us ample opportunities to tune into/notice when the mind has drifted away from awareness of the moment and to note with friendly awareness & curiosity whatever it was that lead the mind away whilst

practising how to gently yet firmly bring the attention back to the focus and so reconnecting with this moment-by-moment awareness.

By deliberately using the Breathing space whenever a sense of tension in the body arises or when noticing unpleasant feelings arousing an opportunity is provided to loosen the hold of the habitual, automatic reactions to STRESS. Haven't there been times when you just needed some "breathing space"? It provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and into the present moment. What we are doing is creating a space to reconnect with your natural resilience and wisdom. You are simply tuning in to what is happening right now, without expectation of any particular result.

Mindful Walking

1. Find a place where you can walk up and down without feeling concerned about whether people can see you. It can be inside or outside. The length can vary between 7-10 paces.
2. Stand at one end of your walk with your feet parallel to each other, about four to six inches apart, and your knees "unlocked" so that they can gently flex. Allow your arms to hang loosely by your sides or hold your hands loosely together in front of your body. Direct your gaze, softly, straight ahead.
3. Bring the focus of your awareness to the bottoms of your feet, getting a direct sense of the physical sensations of the contact of the feet with the ground and of the weight of your body transmitted through your legs and feet to the ground. You may find it helpful to flex the knees slightly a few times to get a clearer sense of the sensations in the feet and legs.
4. Allow the left heel to slowly rise from the ground, noticing the sensations in the calf muscles as you do so, and continue, allowing the whole of the left foot to gently lift, as the weight is shifted entirely to the right leg. Bring awareness to the sensations in the left foot and leg as you carefully move it forward and allow the left heel to come in contact with the ground. Allow the rest of the left foot to make contact with the ground, experiencing the weight of the body shifting forward onto the left leg and foot, as the right heel comes off the ground.
5. With the weight fully transferred to the left leg, allow the rest of the right foot to lift, and move it slowly forward, aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the foot and leg as you do so. Focus your attention on the right heel as it makes contact with the ground. Be aware of the weight now shifting forward onto the whole of the right foot as it is placed gently on the ground, and the rising of the left heel again.
6. In this way, slowly move from one end of the walk to the other, aware in particular of the sensations in the bottoms of the feet and heels as they make contact with the ground, and of the sensations in the muscles of the legs as they swing forward.
7. When you come to the end the walk, pause for a few moments then turn slowly around, aware of and appreciating the complex pattern of movements through which the body changes direction, and continue walking.

8. Walk up and down in this way, aware, as best you can, of the sensations in the feet and legs, and of the contact of the feet with the ground. Keep your gaze directed softly ahead.
9. When you notice that the mind has wandered away from awareness of the sensations of walking, gently escort the focus of attention back to the sensations in the feet and legs, using the sensations as the feet contact the ground, in particular, as an "anchor" to reconnect with the present moment, just as you used the breath in the sitting meditation. If the mind is very agitated, it is helpful to stop for a moment, and just stand here, feet together, until both mind and body re-stabilize themselves. Then resume the mindful walking.
10. Continue to walk for ten to fifteen minutes, or longer if you wish.
11. To begin with, walk at a pace that is slower than usual, to give yourself a better chance to be fully aware of the sensations of walking. Once you feel comfortable with walking slowly with awareness, you can experiment, as well, with walking at faster speeds up to and beyond normal walking speed. If you are feeling particularly agitated, it may be helpful to begin walking fast, with awareness, and to slow down naturally as you settle.
12. As often as you can, bring the same kind of awareness that you cultivate in walking meditation to your normal, everyday, experiences of walking. (Extract adapted by Fiona O'Donnell mindfulnesscentre.ie)

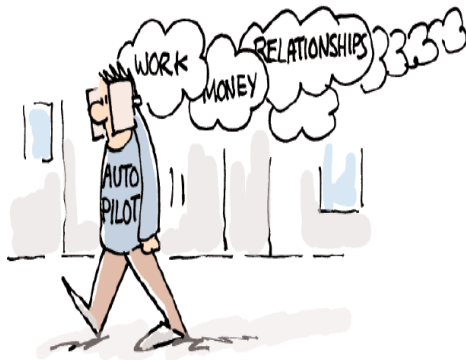


image: CBTpanic.org

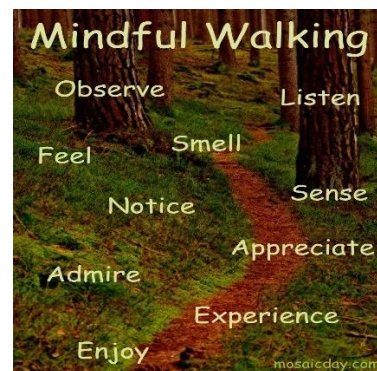


image: Mosaic Day-Wholelifechallenge.com

STAYING PRESENT: BODY (ANCHOR & A MESSENGER)

Remember to use your body as a gateway to awareness. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this. What are the sensations in your body at this moment? When you finish reading and stand, feel the moments of standing, of walking to the next activity, of how you lie down at the end of the day. Be IN your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn. It is as simple as that.

Just patiently practice feeling what is here – and the body is always here – until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?

It is very simple. Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.

(Adapted by Josphine Lynch & Helen Byrne @ Mindfulnesscentre.ie from: J. Goldstein (1993): Insight Meditation)



THE STRESS REACTION CYCLE

(A genetically hard-wired early warning system)

STRESS is a “Biologically-based body/mind evolutionary response of an organism due to disturbances of equilibrium characterized by: high level of activation (heart beats faster, adrenalin flows, mind starts racing), “negative” emotions and increased self-referencing. Stress causes chemical changes in the body that, left unchecked, can have negative effects on both mental and physical health. High levels of stress contribute to health issues as diverse as depression, insomnia, heart disease, skin disorders and headaches... **What is a “stressor”?** A stimulus (disturbance in the equilibrium) - anything that causes the activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System and the consequent release of stress hormones.

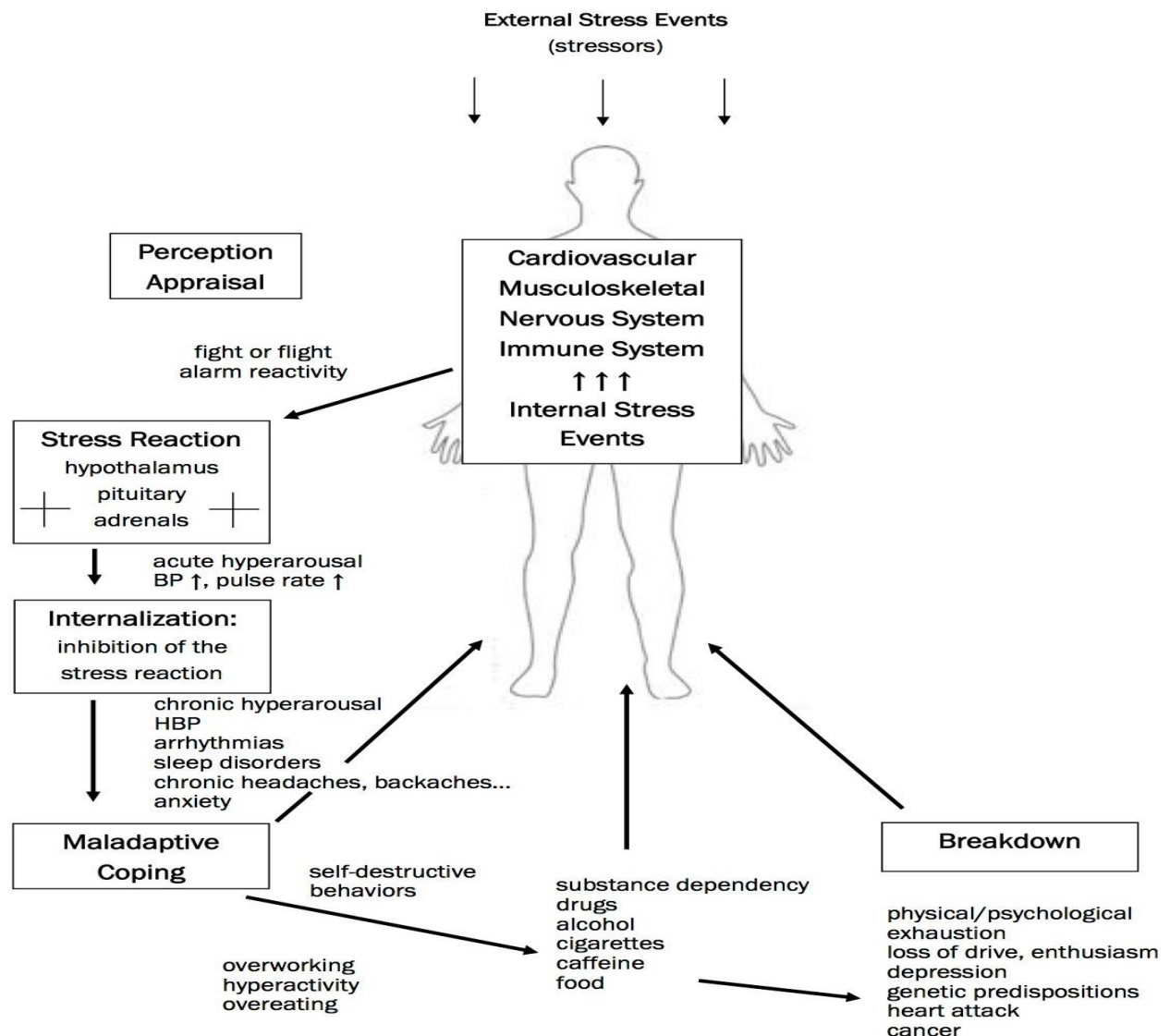
STRESSORS - Adapted from: floridamindfulness.org

- Stressors can be physiological (something putting a strain on the body, such as extreme heat/ cold, injury, chronic illness, pain, hunger, tiredness)
- Stressors can be psychological (events, situations, individuals, comments or anything we interpret as a threat).
- Stressors can be acute(short-term) due to something being “N.U.T.S” (Novel, Unpredictable, Threat to the Ego, loss of Sense of control), or
- Stressors can be chronic (long lasting-i.e. dealing with a sick relative, ongoing overtime at work, an ongoing relationship problem).
- Stressors can be absolute (stressors that everyone exposed to them would interpret as being stressful. (i.e. earthquakes, a tsunami etc)
- Stressors can be relative (only some exposed to them would interpret as being stressful. (i.e. public speaking, time pressure at work, traffic).

The Modern Dinosaur Threat! Today’s threats consist of rush hour traffic, missing a deadline, bouncing a check or having an argument with our boss or spouse. Nonetheless, these modern-day stressors trigger the activation of our fight or flight system as if our physical survival was threatened. Daily, toxic stress hormones flow into our bodies for events that pose no real threat to our physical survival. It is a physical expression of our “Fight, Freeze or Flight” survival mechanism. It is natural. A threatening situation will trigger a stress response, which prepares us to confront or flee a possible danger. This helps for immediate danger but unfortunately the stress response is also triggered by tense situations where physical action is not an option. To protect ourselves in a world of psychological—rather than physical—danger, we must consciously pay attention to unique signals telling us whether we are in fight or flight -

The Stress-Reaction Cycle

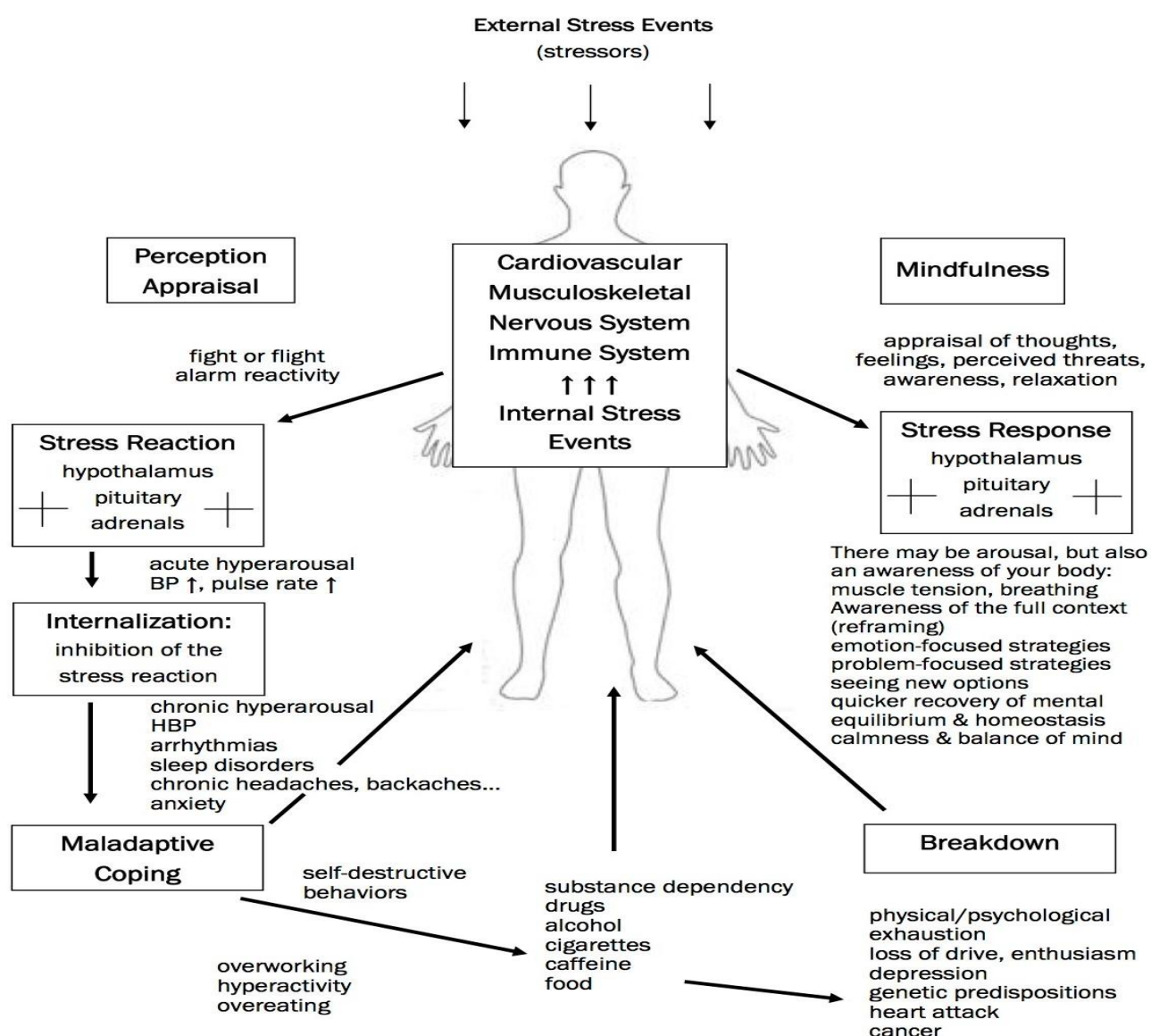
By recognizing the symptoms and signs of being in fight or flight, we can begin to take steps to handle the stress overload-



Perspective is extremely important in causing something to be a stressor or not for any given person. This understanding gives us two powerful tools for reducing our stress:

1. **Adapting** when possible our external **environment** i.e. (*Physical, Emotional & Psychological safety*) by withdrawing from toxic, noisy or hostile environment; being with people who genuinely care for us, learning better communication skills, getting out hurtful relationships & nurturing a sense of purpose, releasing feelings of shame, worthlessness and excessive guilt.
2. **De-bunk our perceptions of reality:** (Technique that bring awareness to our mental perspectives, our attitudes, our beliefs and our emotional reactions to the events that happen to us. Without changing our reality, we can alter our perception of reality—viewing the difficulties of life as events that make us stronger and more loving. In the Buddhist tradition, this is referred to as developing a "supple mind."

Mindfulness-Based Stress Response



IN MBSR the core skill is learning to become more aware of these habitual tendencies to Stress Reactions and instead **react mindfully & responsively** with conscious stress-responses.

As mindfulness grows, we can begin to recognize when stress is arising in our bodies, emotions, thoughts and behaviour, – using our breath as an anchor to put the brakes on stress reactivity – turn toward what has arisen with kindness and curiosity. We can then engage our natural wisdom to perceive the situation with more clarity and respond with wisdom. Difficult things are part of life! It is how we handle them that determine the extent to which they rule our lives. We can learn to relate more lightly to them. By becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events, we can free ourselves from habitual, automatic, ways of reacting and, instead, mindfully respond in more skilful ways.

Wild Geese

*You do not have to be good. You do not have
to walk on your knees for a hundred miles
through the desert, repenting.*

*You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it
loves.*

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you about mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

*Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the
rain are moving across the landscapes, over
the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains
and the rivers.*

*Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clear blue
air, are heading home again.*

*Whoever you are, no matter how
lonely, the world offers itself to your
imagination, calls to you like the
wild geese, harsh and exciting – over
and over announcing your place in
the family of things.*



Mary Oliver: *Dream Work: New And Selected
Poems*. Beacon Press, Boston 1996.

HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK 4

1. Continue to practice the Body Scan & Mindful movement on alternate days.
2. Continue to record your practices on the Home-Practice Sheets
3. Practice the Guided Sitting Meditation (6 out of 7 days)
4. Use the 3-mins BREATHING SPACE – (REGULAR): At least three times a day.
(e.g. on waking up and/or going to bed, before a program you regularly watch, before eating, after washing your hands, on first sitting down in your car or on the bus or at your desk).
5. This week see if you can be aware of your reactions to stress- without trying to change them. Notice if you are blocking, numbing, or shutting off from the moment, when it happens, and how this feels in your body? Do you notice yourself refusing or resisting what is happening at the time? And when do you find yourself willing to 'embrace the unwanted'?



Home Practice Record Form—Session 4

Record on the Home Practice Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

| Day/date | Practice (Yes/No) | Comments |
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HALFWAY REVIEW REFLECTIONS

Sunday Morning MBSR is about taking steps in participating in your OWN Health & Well-Being. Sessions 1-4 have focused on 'becoming aware' of the 'wandering mind' and using awareness to come back to the present as we are developing skills in moving our attentiveness to different areas. We are now half-way through this course. The focus in the second half of the programme is on cultivating a different relationship with our internal & external experiences in our daily lives.

Take a moment to reflect on the 2 questions below-

- **What am I learning through this process?**



- **What do I need to do over the next 4 weeks to get the most out of the rest of this course?**