

BIRKBECK WELLBEING SERVICES



KINDNESS

18-24th May is Mental Health Awareness week.

The theme this year is kindness.

The Wellbeing Services at Birkbeck are focussing on Kindness to the Self

*Choose
Kindness*

We are living through a time of exceptional disruption, uncertainty and loss, and maintaining our mental health and equilibrium at this time is fundamental.

Studying in the current environment of disturbance is challenging. We can fall into habits such as forgetting the things that are helpful to us, berating or speaking harshly to ourselves, only focussing on others and their needs.

There are myriad ways of neglecting ourselves and denying ourselves what we need: self-compassion, self-care and kindness.

SLEEP

Many of us are struggling with sleep during the lockdown?

Re-evaluating our bedtime routines and focussing on improving our sleep hygiene is a significant way in which we can be kind to ourselves.



*Choose
kindness*

SLEEP ADVICE

Create an **environment of absolute darkness** (consider your curtains, screen time, TV use ahead of bedtime)

Embrace daylight, particularly morning light.

Work out a **bedtime routine**, including a 90-minute tech buffer zone ahead of sleep. Consider setting a “bedtime alarm” to remind you when tech buffer zone starts and stick to it. Computers, phones, bright lights should all be excluded: consider excluding TV as well.

Manage your “emotional commotion” ahead of bedtime i.e. avoiding being in a heightened alert state or wound up. No emails, difficult conversations, exercise, in the two hours ahead of bedtime. Might require a degree of assertiveness to say no to some of these. Consider meditation/relaxation techniques to still your mind ahead of bed.

Caffeine control: consider having your last caffeinated drink before noon. Caffeine has a half-life of 6 hours, the length of time it stays in your system. Meaning that if you drink a caffeinated drink at 3pm, it may well still be in your system at bedtime.

(With thanks to Dr Rangan Chatterjee – “*The 4 Pillar Plan*”.)

SLEEP RESOURCES

More sleep tips available in [this podcast](#)

[Meditations](#) - including a 13-minute audio Sleep Aid Body Scan

[App for mindfulness](#) - incl sleep programmes

[Headspace](#) has made a name for itself as a meditation app, but it's also great for sleep. The free version has "sleepcasts," which are 45-55 minute-long audio experiences (bedtime stories for adults) that help you visualize calming experiences, like a slow moving train or a walk through a garden. There are new stories every night, so you you'll never get bored.

EATING & EXERCISE

Many of us will have found that our eating habits have changed during lockdown, and with the restrictions in place, it can be hard to find a way to exercise or to motivate ourselves to do so.

Paying attention to what our bodies need in terms of nutrition and regular activity is an important way of being kind to ourselves.

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20 Exercise Benefits

1. Reduces body fat
2. Increases lifespan
3. Oxygenates body
4. Strengthens muscles
5. Manages chronic pain
6. Wards off viruses
7. Reduces diabetes risk
8. Strengthens heart
9. Clears arteries
10. Boosts mood
11. Maintains mobility
12. Improves memory
13. Improves coordination
14. Strengthens bones
15. Improves complexion
16. Detoxifies body
17. Decreases stress
18. Boosts immune system
19. Lowers blood pressure
20. Reduces cancer risk

www.facebook.com/montereybayholistic

EATING & EXERCISE RESOURCES

Consider practising Mindful eating – this is an [article](#) explaining the concept, and this is [A Mindful Eating blog](#)

If you are worried about your eating habits at the moment, and feel that they may be disordered or harmful to you, this [Eating Disorders charity](#) has a huge amount of information.

If exercise is proving challenging at the moment, consider aiming simply to move more. Aims could include trying increase the number of steps you take per day until you are walking the recommended 10,000. If you are challenged for space, some form of [strength training](#) would be beneficial.

There are lots of workouts of different sorts available at the [NHS Fitness Studio](#)

RELAXATION

How to maintain mental equilibrium is a constant challenge in this time of extraordinary uncertainty. In lockdown, life has never been so predictable, staying at home for weeks on end. But we have no idea what lies ahead. One answer could be to develop the capacity to still your mind, and allow yourself to retreat for a while from the worries and frenzy.

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RELAXATION RESOURCES

A good beginning would be to listen to a [Mindfulness Meditation Podcast](#) from the Guardian. [Longer meditations](#) are also available.

With limited space, you could consider a [Walking Meditation Practice](#)

Two well-known resources for mindfulness and meditation are:

<https://www.calm.com/>

<http://franticworld.com/>

RELAXATION: BREATHING EXERCISE

You might consider trying the 4-7-8 breathing technique, or “Relaxing Breath”.

Adopt a comfortable sitting position and place the tip of the tongue on the tissue right behind the top front teeth. Focus on the following breathing pattern:

- empty the lungs of air
- breathe in quietly through the nose for 4 seconds
- hold the breath for a count of 7 seconds
- exhale forcefully through the mouth, pursing the lips and making a “whoosh” sound, for 8 seconds
- repeat the cycle up to 4 times

This technique can help in reducing anxiety, getting to sleep, managing cravings, controlling or reducing anger responses and focussing the mind.

SELF-COMPASSION

How do you speak to yourself? Are you critical or demanding, guilt-tripping or judgmental?

In the current situation we might be speaking to ourselves differently from usual. Is it possible to catch this, and begin to speak benignly, understandingly, with acceptance and kindness?

In short, how can we encourage a sense of compassion towards ourselves.

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SELF-COMPASSION RESOURCES

An article by Dr Kristin Neff on [Self Compassion](#)

And if that article speaks to you then [The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion: Kristin Neff](#) is a video TED talk explaining about anxiety and how you can learn to change your inner dialogue and learn to self-soothe.

Comprehensive [workbook and information sheets](#) on developing self-compassion are available from an Australian organisation offering self-help with CBT methods.

[Journalling](#) can also be a very helpful way to observe your inner-script and begin to alter the tone in which you speak to yourself.

KINDNESS & WORK

As we approach the end of the academic year in some of the most uncertain times in living memory, it is difficult to summon the motivation and focus to complete work or study for exams.

Whatever stage of your studies you are at, the problems posed by the current situation are legion. Helping ourselves to achieve what we set out to do, is a form of self-kindness.

At the heart of this is the question of how can we maintain sufficient balance and motivation to attend to our tasks and deadlines and finish this year well.



KINDNESS & WORK RESOURCES

A comprehensive [Guide to living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty](#) at the present time

An interesting TED talk on [Why we all need to practice emotional first aid](#)

A link to the Birkbeck Counselling Service's 13 minute podcast [Stress-Less](#)

Procrastination is a problem with many students generally, and with the current situation it is for some even more difficult to engage with their work. A helpful (and entertaining) blog on [Why Procrastinators Procrastinate](#) and also [How to Beat Procrastination](#)

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