

E L E V E N

Week 7

Taking Care of Yourself

If someone comes along and shoots an arrow into your heart, it's fruitless to stand there and yell at the person. It would be much better to turn your attention to the fact that there's an arrow in your heart.

—PEMA CHÖDRÖN

I N T E N T I O N S

- ✦ *To adjust your lifestyle to reduce stress.*
- ✦ *To identify your nourishing and depleting activities.*
- ✦ *To develop a mindful stress management action plan.*
- ✦ *To discover what a “mindful action step” is.*

NOT LONG AGO a young woman named Valentina applied for one of my online training programs and told me on the phone a lot about her background. She said that after experiencing a string of traumatic events she was so racked with panic and agony that she turned to an array of drugs to try to numb her emotions. Eventually she reached the proverbial rock bottom, with no friends or family willing to continue a relationship with her.

Miraculously, one day she discovered an uncashed check made out to her for a sizable sum, and this presented her with a choice. Describing her decision as flowing from a rare moment of clarity, she invested in rehab instead of funding her addictions. At the rehab center she happened upon a stone bench beside a stream and felt inexplicably drawn

to it. Without knowing that what she was doing was actually a form of meditation, she sat cross-legged on the bench and listened to the trickling water with her eyes closed, in the midst of a peaceful silence that instantly felt healing.

For Valentina, this was the first step on the road to mindfulness, self-compassion, and new self-awareness honed through meditation practice and daily journaling. As she described her transformation from a hard-drinking, drugging hedonist to a sober vegan yogi, she laughed boisterously and marveled at the fact that people—including those who had once found her impossible to be around—now often point out how cheerful and open she is. Quietly then, Valentina said she thought her friendly personality combined with her difficult history would make her a dedicated, empathetic mindfulness teacher.

I did, of course, accept Valentina into the course.

In one transformative moment, Valentina chose life rather than the path to self-destruction, and that was an act of self-care. From that important fork in the road, I'm sure there were many moments of choice where she could have gone back to her old lifestyle. But she got through, using mindfulness. That initial choice has led her to eat healthy food, exercise, practice meditation and yoga, and spend time with good company. This kind of nourishing lifestyle has borne such powerful fruit that she has the energy, enthusiasm, and love to share her discoveries with others. Her self-care and self-compassion are spilling over into care and compassion for others in her original predicament. Without caring for herself, this would be impossible.

Looking After Yourself

There are probably many demands on your time and energy, and looking after yourself can easily slip down the to-do list. Perhaps you're a busy mom, a pressured business executive, or recently bereaved. When faced with lots of demands, it's easy to forget to take care of yourself. When you do look after yourself, your feelings of distress begin to turn into positive eustress (see Chapter 7), and you're better able to meet life's challenges with a smile.

Take a moment to think about how caring owners treat their dog. They wash and groom him, give him sufficient and healthy food, ensure their dog is at the right weight, and exercise the dog every day. They make sure they give their beloved animal time and attention and play games with the dog when out and about. At night they make sure their dog is warm enough and has a place to sleep. So dogs are given food, exercise, fun, love, and rest. And in return the dog gives unconditional love to the owner. We humans also need

at least the same sort of love and care to meet life's challenges with enthusiasm and hope.

Before you start thinking how little you take care of yourself, take a few moments to reflect on how much your body already looks after you. All day and night, your body breathes for you. Your heart beats over 100,000 times in a day to pump blood containing oxygen, nutrients, and immune cells around your body. Your digestive system processes 1,100 pounds of food a year. Your body urges you to eat, sleep, and move around to keep you alive and well. So in all these many ways, your body is taking care of you.

But you have a role to play too. Taking care of yourself involves eating a balanced diet, sleeping sufficiently, and exercising your body. And just as important, you need to make time for socializing, having fun, and doing things you enjoy. Exactly what you need to do to look after yourself is unique to you, and only you can know what the right choices are. By being more aware of your body and mind, you can learn to take better care of yourself.

For example, one client of mine started getting painful spots on his legs. He tried to ignore them and carried on with his high-pressure job. Eventually they became so painful he couldn't walk, and he had to get antibiotics from his doctor and take time off work. Now he's more mindful of his body, and when the spots appear, he needs to make a conscious effort to practice mindfulness and take a little time off. He hasn't suffered from a severe recurrence of the spots ever since.

For you the warning signs may be a headache, a bout with the flu, painful shoulders, or just dwelling on everything that's going wrong in your life. Use these signs to remind you to be kind to yourself rather than pushing harder or reprimanding yourself for not being perfect.

This week you'll have a chance to look at your typical daily activities. You can then identify what, if anything, needs to be adjusted so that you're nourishing your body and mind, not just depleting yourself. You'll also look at a set of five areas to focus on, to help boost your well-being and build resilience against stressors.

The Challenge of Taking Care of Yourself

If looking after ourselves were easy, we would all be doing it well. But in reality, there are challenges that prevent you from taking full care of yourself. Some of them are external factors, and others may just be attitudes in your own mind. Let's look at a few typical challenges and tips to overcome them.

Lack of willpower is rated as the number-one reason we don't take effective care of ourselves, according to the American Psychological Association.

If you know you need to go to bed on time or go for a run, but somehow end up wasting time, you may need some help to boost your self-control. Here are some tips for increasing your willpower:

- **Mindfulness meditation increases willpower.** Even a few minutes a day can start building up gray matter in areas of the brain that control decision making.
- **Exercise.** People who exercise are more likely to quit smoking, reduce alcohol consumption, eat more healthily, and even be more careful with their spending habits.
- **Sleep.** The closer you can get to about 7½ hours of sleep a night, the stronger your willpower will be.
- **Build good habits.** When you're under stress, you go back to your habits, good or bad. So by having good habits, you will be better able to handle or even enjoy the stress.
- **Being nice to yourself really works.** When you lapse, being self-critical reduces your willpower. One of the most well-tested areas in willpower research is that self-compassion is the most effective way to achieve good new habits. Remember that you're only human and can't be perfect.

Lack of time is a common reason people give for not taking care of themselves through measures like exercise or cooking a proper meal. If this is the case for you, I'd recommend you spend a week tracking how you spend your time, hour by hour. When I did this, just the act of setting an alarm every hour and writing down how I was spending my time made me much more efficient. I then managed to get to sleep on time rather than surfing online and exercised rather than working unproductively. Many time management gurus recommend time tracking as the first step toward using time effectively.

If you feel overwhelmed with responsibilities, you may feel too pressured to be able to look after yourself well. But even a 5-minute brisk walk a day can start to create small positive changes in your brain and body to help you cope with the busyness of life.

Finally, you may think of taking care of yourself as being selfish. Recall the safety advice on flights: Always put on your own oxygen mask before doing the same for anyone else. By taking good care of yourself, you'll feel better, have more energy, and be able to help others.

"Through mindfulness I realized I was constantly running around looking after my kids and husband and parents. I never had time for myself. Never. I immediately decided things have got to change. That's been a huge relief."

I have struggled with this idea myself. When I first became a school-teacher, I was young, full of energy, and wanted to change the world. I gave all my energy to caring for my students rather than myself. I worked harder and harder until I started to get ill. Not spending my free time working on lesson plans, marking books, or doing extra training seemed selfish. But I started to notice a pattern. The harder I worked, the less energy I had for the kids and the less effective I was as a teacher. On the days I rested well, I had far more patience and the lessons went well. Taking care of myself, even if I felt guilty at first, was better for both my students and me. Nowadays, I love taking care of myself!

When to Take Care of Yourself

Seeing to your own needs is not something you do only when feeling worn out, stressed, or tired. If you do it all the time, as a matter of course, you'll be resilient when the next stressor comes around the corner. However, it's especially important to look after your needs when under excessive stress.

Take plants as an example. In winter, when it's cooler, my plants don't need much watering. Once a week is fine. But in the summer, in the relentless heat, daily watering is necessary. Otherwise the plants will wilt and weaken. When the heat is on, more nourishment is required.

In the same way, when the heat of stress is high, take extra care of yourself. After a stressful day, take a few moments or a few minutes to practice your favorite mindfulness meditation. Try to see the practice as a little treat after a tough day. This may help you go to bed a little earlier, eat a bit healthier, or maybe give you motivation to take time to exercise. Even a 5-minute phone call to your best friend can make a world of difference. A little bit of mindfulness following a challenging day will be an investment that pays back handsomely.

A Look at Your Current Lifestyle

Before you start thinking about how great or poor you are at taking care of yourself, let's start by taking a closer look at your current lifestyle. The activities you do habitually will give you a good idea about what's going well and which areas need tweaking. Until you stop and write this down, you may not realize how you currently use your time.

You'll then rate each activity as either energizing (nourishing) or draining (depleting). This will help you see what proportion of your day is uplifting

and what proportion isn't. You can then either look at creative ways of readjusting your schedule or readjusting your attitude and perception so the draining activities aren't quite so draining.

Here's a sample list:

7:00 A.M.—Wake up
 7:15 A.M.—Shower and get dressed
 7:45 A.M.—Get the kids ready for school
 8:30 A.M.—(Rush) to school
 9:00 A.M.—Drive to work
 9:30 A.M.—Arrive at work
 9:45 A.M.—Work on new marketing plan
 And so on . . .

EXERCISE: My Nourishing and Depleting Activities

1. **Create your own daily list** of activities you do in a typical day.
2. **Add a +** for activities that are nourishing, uplifting, or energizing for you. These are the activities that make you feel good.
3. **Add a –** to activities that are depleting or make you feel drained or tired. These are the activities that make you feel worse.
4. **Which positive activities can you do more often?** Go through the list and see which ones you could do more of. For example, going for a walk, reading a story to the kids, waking up a few minutes earlier to have time for a nice cup of coffee.
5. **Which negative activities can you reduce?** For example, cut checking social media sites to only once a day, doing fewer chores by delegating, such as training the children to wash the dishes after dinner, or making some activities less stressful by, for instance, listening to your favorite music on your morning commute.

VARIATION: Compare your thoughts with reality. Record how you felt as soon as you can after doing the activity and how strongly you felt on a scale of 1–10 (1 being very mild and 10 being very intense)—for example, happy 7/10 or annoyed 8/10. See if the activity really was nourishing or depleting for you. For example, people think they enjoy watching television for hours, but when they actually do this, they rate it as just about as interesting as sitting in the bathroom!

GOING DEEPER: If you enjoy this process and want more detail, try recording your daily activities for a full week, including the weekend, to get a clearer picture of what you do. And jot down your mood every hour or so to see if you can spot any patterns.

TIPS Some activities may seem energizing at the time, but later on you find they have depleted your energy. For example, drinking several glasses of wine may seem to make you feel good at the time, but later on in the evening, you may regret it. In that case, you may choose to label it as depleting.

Other activities may feel draining but actually energize you. For example, exercise may feel like it's depleting your energy at the time you do it, but afterward, or perhaps the next day, you may feel more energized.

I recommend you record your feelings as soon as you can after the experience, but look out for these patterns in your journal, described in the drinking and exercise example above.

Reflection

Did you make any new discoveries through this exercise? What changes in your schedule, or perhaps your attitude, can you make? Small changes like that can have a surprisingly big impact.

For example, one of my clients who used to find it depleting to listen to her mother on the phone practiced mindful breathing as she listened. The phone calls became meditation time rather than criticism and fight time, and she felt less overwhelmed by the stress as a result.

Tales of Wisdom: How to Walk on Water

Three monks were sitting by the side of a lake in meditation. Suddenly, the first monk got up and said, "I forgot to put my underwear out to dry!" and miraculously walked on the water, across the lake, and into his hut, before promptly returning.

Before long, the second monk jumped up and said, "I forgot to flush

the toilet” and immediately got up and strolled on top of water, into his hut, and came back again, in the same amazing way.

The third monk thought, “These monks think they have some sort of superior meditation technique and are just showing off. I can do that easily. I’m a far better meditator than they’ll ever be.” The monk stood up, attempted to confidently walk on water, and immediately fell into the lake. He got out, psyched himself up, and tried again. The same thing happened. Before long, he was completely soaked.

The other two monks calmly watched the scene, and then one monk said to the other, “Shall we tell him where the stones are?”

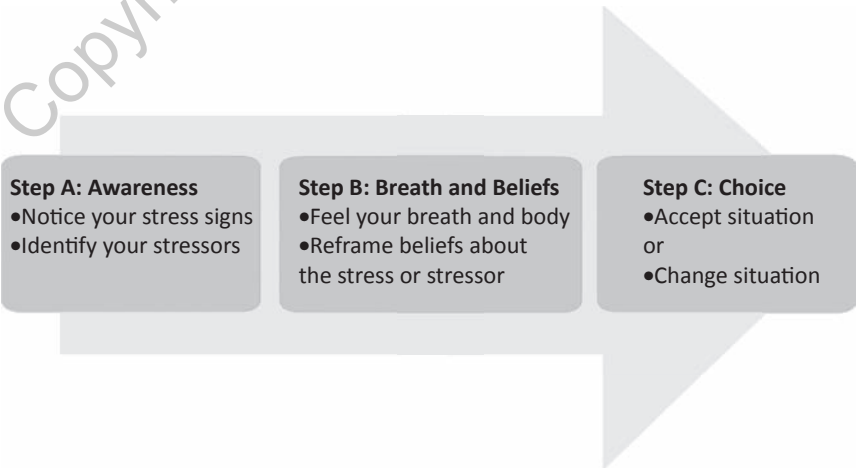
What’s the moral of the story for you?

When Stress Overwhelms

The following practice is a three-step exercise you can try using when you feel overwhelmed by stress.

PRACTICE: The Mindful ABC

The exercise is made up of steps A, B, and C to make it easier to remember. A stands for awareness, B stands for breath and beliefs, and C stands for choosing a mindful action, as explained on pages 245–246 and illustrated in the diagram below.



Step A: Awareness

Become aware of your stress signs. These are the thoughts, feelings, and sensations in your body and behavior that you notice when you're too stressed.

The signs vary for different people. For me, I feel a slight twitch in my eyelid, I don't feel like talking to my friends, I have a tension in my shoulders, and I get irritated by the slightest disturbance. I'm reluctant to talk to others. What are your signs? Look back at Chapter 5 to remind yourself.

Step B: Breath and Beliefs*Breath*

Take a few slow, deep mindful breaths. Then allow your breathing to be as it is and feel its sensation. Expand your awareness to your body and feel all the sensations there, accepting them as they are. Recognize any tight or tense bodily sensations as part and parcel of the stress response if that's what they are. No need to try to change the sensation—just watch and, if you can, accept them.

Beliefs

Now ask yourself: "What exactly am I stressed about?" Your answer may be "I'm concerned that I won't finish the report on time" or "I'm worried I'll run out of money this month." Then consider reevaluating your current beliefs about stress itself. It's not always easy, but see if you can give it a go. Think, "This stress is energizing me to prepare to complete the report" rather than just "I must reduce my stress" or "Stress is bad." Remember that stress can be healthy in short bursts as it sharpens your senses, strengthens you to act, releases oxytocin to urge you to be with others, and initially boosts your immune function. You could also reevaluate your stressor—for example, "Yes, I'm scared about running out of money for rent, but I could always borrow from Dad if worse comes to worst."

Step C: Choose a Mindful Action

This step is about choosing what to do next.

Whatever the stressor, you either need to change the situation or accept what you can't change.

If you decide that you need to change the situation: Maybe you need to call the employment agency, finish that report, or take your child home if he's having a tantrum.

If you decide you need to accept the situation, at least for now, you can:

- *Choose to do something energizing.* Consider going for a walk, run, jog, running up or down the stairs. The activity may help to burn up your stress hormones, which is what your body is gearing up to do—act. Integrate your activity with mindful awareness rather than just letting your mind worry.
- *Choose to do something relaxing.* This can be any activity that you have time for and that appeals to you. Here are some examples: have a bath, listen to music, garden, go for a drive, meditation, or yoga. Do the activity with mindful awareness.
- *Choose to be mindful in the moment.* You may choose just to be fully mindful in whatever you do next. This may be the case if you're traveling or at work or in the middle of a conversation. Just choose one of your senses and fully connect with it. Immerse your attention in the experience. Ideally, I'd recommend you be mindfully aware and have a spirit of kindness to yourself no matter which choice you make.

Reflection

Make a summary of the Mindful ABC Exercise if it appeals to you. When you try it out, write down what effect the exercise had on your state of mind, your emotions, and whether you dealt with the stressor differently from how you may normally have coped with it.

Raising Well-Being to Reduce Stress

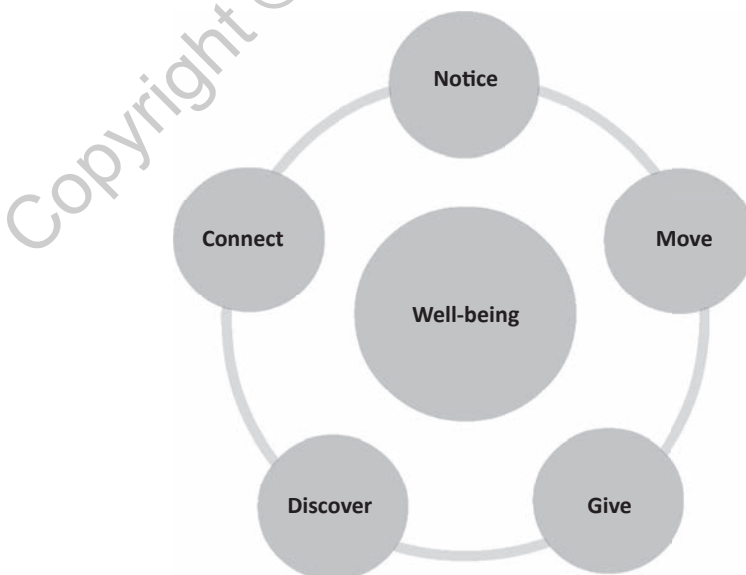
If you're feeling even slightly distressed with the pressures of life, you're probably not feeling happy. You may not even believe that happiness is something achievable for you given your circumstances. And yet taking steps to raise your long-term well-being can increase your resilience to stress.

Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health examined 200 studies on well-being and cardiovascular health. They found both positive emotion and optimism to slow the progression of heart disease and halve the risk of a major issue with your heart, such as a heart attack. So being happy both opens your emotional heart and heals your physical heart!

A fantastic model that I've been using to raise well-being in recent years is called the Five Ways to Well-Being. This is an evidence-based plan from the New Economics Foundation in the United Kingdom, based on the U.K. government's state-of-the-art research on mental well-being. Everyone's path to a life of happiness is different, but these activities have been found by research to be particularly beneficial for raising people's well-being and reduce distress.

The five ways to well-being, depicted in the diagram below, are:

1. **Connect**—This is about increasing the quality of your relationships with friends, family, coworkers, or even neighbors.
2. **Move**—This area emphasizes the importance of moving your body rather than being sedentary.
3. **Notice**—This is almost directly about mindfulness and how your awareness of your inner thoughts and emotions helps to clarify your values and direction in life. You also notice and appreciate the world around you.
4. **Discover**—This is about learning new things. Not necessarily through just books or courses or by earning certificates, but anything new.



5. **Give**—This is about learning to give of yourself a little bit every day and enjoy the feeling of helping others. This too can help to enhance your connections and build the quality and depth of your social network.

A very small action in any one of these areas often has a lasting impact, just as a small pebble creates ripples throughout a lake. By improving one area, you'll start to improve them all. And, as you'll note in the descriptions that follow, mindfulness underlies them all.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

A powerful way of raising your resilience to stress and enjoy greater well-being is through social relationships. Close relationships with family and friends offer love and support. Broader connections bring a sense of belonging. Seek to be close enough to a few people so you can turn to one another at times of difficulty.

"I didn't notice any changes from practicing mindfulness, but my wife has! She says I'm much less reactive and nicer to be with. And when she says something like that, she means it! I can see it's improving our connection."

One of the great advantages of a conversation with someone you trust, when you're distressed, is putting things into perspective. As you'll recall, one of the core factors that drives stress is how you interpret the situation. If you're in an anxious state, that interpretation is not happening through the wise, calm part of your brain: the prefrontal cortex. Instead, it's a reaction

arising from activation in the amygdala, the part that wants you to focus on danger and see the negative consequences.

Here are some different ways for developing your social network that you may not have considered for a while:

Ways of Making New Friends

- **Carpool to work.** Your employer may organize it, or just ask colleagues at work. It's a great way to get to know someone.
- **Use online social networks** to connect with your old friends. I've recently managed to get in touch with friends from primary school, and it's been like we were never apart when we met up.
- **Walk a dog.** Dog owners often end up chatting with each other. You could even volunteer to walk dogs from a local shelter. A nice opportunity to do some mindful walking too.

Ways of Deepening Your Current Relationships

- **Remember the golden rule:** Treat others the way you'd appreciate being treated yourself.
- **Invest time and energy in your close relationships.** That's the best investment you can make.
- **Give relationships some space.** Balance time together with time pursuing your own interests.
- **Be forgiving.** Everyone makes mistakes; we're all human.

Reflection

Write down who is closest to you in your life. Examples may include family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, mentors, and others.

You don't need to have lots of relationships. Even a small number of close relationships to people you can turn to in times of difficulty is fine. But if it's just one person, consider exploring ways to develop more close relationships with family or friends.

BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Want to reduce your stress and increase your productivity? At the same time, want to reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer by 50%? Then exercise is for you!

Any activity that doesn't involve passively sitting or lying down is a step in the right direction. Going to the gym is not the only way to be physically active. Find activities you enjoy and that are right for your current ability. And if you can do that exercise with others, even better.

Examples of exercise include:

- Walking briskly
- Playing tennis
- Pushing a lawn mower
- Using a vacuum cleaner

If the activity enables you to break a sweat, you're making your heart work and achieving benefits for your body and mind. Be creative and see what activities you can find that get you sweating!

When you combine these activities with mindfulness, the benefits are

not just a physical release of tension, but a brain exercise too—staying in the present moment nonjudgmentally while your body moves. If you do your best to be mindful while doing the physical exercise, you're effectively meditating with all the extra benefits that brings.

How much activity should you do? That's a common question, and the best way for me to answer is to ask: How much activity are you willing to do? Even a 5-minute walk up and down your street has been found to have benefits. And there's mounting evidence that short bouts of exercise, like a brisk walk, can build fitness and help you manage stress.

If you don't do any physical activity at the moment, try these tips to get you moving.

- **Ask yourself:** Are you willing to give physical activity a try if it's fun? Physical activity will make you feel happier, healthier, and live longer. It will improve your brain function, make you feel more confident, help reduce smoking, and even lower your credit card bill, as you're less likely to spend money to feel better!
- **Boost your willpower.** You can do this by one of the following: getting to bed on time, practicing meditation, and eating foods with a low glycemic index (GI). Foods with a low GI are generally better for you, as they raise your blood sugar level slowly. With greater willpower, you'll be more likely to create an exercise habit.
- **Spend time with people who do exercise regularly.** You are more likely to think of physical activity positively if you have friends who do the same. They may inspire you to get moving.
- **Make a plan and measure.** By making a basic activity plan and recording what you achieved, you'll be much more likely to stick to it. You could use an app on your phone or simply record it in your journal or other notebook. Set a small, manageable goal to start with, like a 5-minute walk every day.
- **Be self-compassionate when you lapse.** On the days you don't manage to exercise, practice self-kindness. This is hard to believe for many people, but being too strict with yourself when you fail makes it more likely you'll fail again. Forgiving yourself puts you in a more positive mind-set, making another setback less likely.
- **Exercise with a friend.** If you can, find someone else to do your physical activities with. You can then motivate each other, and on the days you want to give up, your friend will encourage you.
- **Reduce your sitting time.** Even if you do half an hour of exercise a day, recent research has found if you spend hours at work sitting, the exercise makes a limited difference health-wise. Try standing while on

the phone, having a walking meeting, or going for a stroll at lunchtime. Stand and move throughout the day as much as you can.

TAKE NOTICE

Noticing or, in other words, mindfulness, helps you stimulate curiosity and appreciate the world around you. Rather than seeing life in a habitual way, you wake up and enjoy what's going well in your life. Connect with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Noticing your own thoughts and feelings can also clarify what direction you want to go in life. So you're making conscious decisions, not being set in your old ways.

Apart from practicing meditation, yoga, or tai chi, here are some more unusual ways of improving your noticing skills:

- **Watch for all objects with a certain color** for a few minutes. For example, if I pick green, I can now notice trees, grass, a highlighter pen, a logo on a business card, a part of my teacup, and a pattern on my curtain.
- **Do one task at half the normal speed for just 1 minute.** What else do you then notice? If I try that while typing, I suddenly notice how smooth the keys are and that I'm sitting in a twisted posture.
- **Try doing nothing for 5 minutes a day.** Yup, nothing. Just sit there or lie there and see what happens. If that's really difficult to do, due to time pressure, maybe you need to look at managing your time differently.
- **Count how many different sounds you can hear when you're waiting in a queue.** When I stop to try this, I notice cars in the distance, a boiling kettle, a distant plane, and plates being clattered. I wasn't aware of any of that before.
- **Ask yourself three questions:** How do I feel right now? What am I thinking about right now? What can I notice with my senses right now?

DISCOVER

Learning something new raises your confidence. And because whatever you're learning is new, you naturally become more mindful in the process. Imagine learning to paint or drive for the first time—your attention would be fully in the present as you develop the new skill.

Most people associate learning with school. But your brain is built and thrives on learning new things, and you can learn at any age. And when you learn by doing activities, that learning is enhanced.

Here are some ideas for ways you can keep learning to build resilience and mental well-being:

- Ask the people around you more questions.
- Seek to learn one new fact every day.
- Take a course in painting, playing an instrument, or fixing cars.
- Engage in a new role at work.
- Try playing a new sport, listening to a new audiobook, or cooking something different.
- Visit a museum to learn about a period you find interesting in history, art, or science.
- Try that hobby you've been thinking about, whether it's flying toy helicopters, knitting, or writing fiction.

I've recently tried painting. I must say, I had ideas like "I can't paint!" running through my head the first time. But splashing colors on a canvas and making mistakes was highly therapeutic and fun. I just called it modern art. I've been experimenting with meditating before doing the painting to see what effect that has—it made the paintings more serene and calming to look at. Other things I do to boost learning: listen to a new audiobook every couple of weeks, watch talks on www.ted.com, visit museums when I can, read blogs on science and psychology, read new books and go to lectures and talks on different topics from time to time.

GIVE

You may be surprised to see giving as a recommendation in a chapter on taking care of yourself. But both small and large acts of kindness can boost your sense of well-being, improve your relationships, and help you manage stress in a positive way. Being kind to others is an act of kindness to yourself. Kind people live longer and happier lives. People over age 55 who volunteer for two or more organizations have a 44% lower chance of dying. That's more effective than exercising four times a week!

I discovered a powerful example of this last week. An old friend visited me. After failing several years at university, becoming stressed and frustrated, he visited his doctor, who diagnosed him with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). His doctor advised him to find the time to help others rather than just rest. This seems like strange advice to someone who struggles to have the energy to do his own daily chores. But he took the advice and volunteered for a CFS charity. He began to feel grateful for what he could do, and helping others gave his life meaning again. He now also meditates and

is far more positive and upbeat about his future. He enjoys the challenges in his life rather than feeling crushed by the stress. It seems that giving of himself has helped him reduce stress and increase his happiness.

Here are some ways you can give:

- Praise a colleague with a short e-mail.
- Open the door for someone.
- Make a cup of tea for a coworker.
- Smile more.
- Consider volunteering for the local community.
- Offer to help an elderly person with his or her bag.
- Invite a friend for dinner.
- Offer to help a colleague with a work project.

"I love the feeling of doing something nice for someone else. That was one of my favorite parts of Shamash's course for me. It gave me permission to be nice just for the sake of itself. It lifted my mood every time! It's amazing that I rarely made time to do this before."

EXERCISE: Improving One Area of Your Lifestyle

If you feel overwhelmed with all the things that could improve your well-being, stress not! Try the following steps to clarify one action you could do. Just one action is a fine way to start.

1. Look at the diagram of the five ways to well-being on page 247. Rate how well you're doing in each area on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 for lots of potential for improvement in that area and 5 for doing perfectly well in that area of your life right now, in your opinion.
2. Decide which area you want to develop. You may choose the lowest-value one or the one that you'd most like to develop. It's better to choose the area you're most likely to be successful in and would enjoy.
3. In this coming week, take action in the area you've chosen. For example, if it's Discover, see what new things you learn every day already. Perhaps play a new game with your child, rediscover an old hobby, or join that evening class you've been meaning to take.
4. Do your tiny chosen activity in a mindful way. Savor the experience. And watch to see if you begin to cope better with your

stress. Finish by recording your findings in your journal. And if you're inspired, take another action next month!

Measure to Motivate Yourself

Measuring your daily activities is a great way to boost your motivation. You can measure not only how much exercise you do but also your heart rate, the quality of your sleep, your weight, your mood, how you use your time, the amount of meditation you've done, the number of steps you've taken in a day, and more. Recently my mother started using a pedometer to record how many steps she takes a day, and it has helped motivate her to walk more.

There is now a whole movement based on measuring yourself to help you achieve your goals. It's called quantified self, and you can start exploring at www.quantifiedself.com.

I'm into technology and for the last few months have used a variety of applications on my phone to keep track, which is motivating for me and has helped me develop healthy habits. I've been tracking the amount of time I spend meditating (insight meditation timer app), my weight and eating habits (My Fitness Pal app), the number of walks or runs I do every week and my speed (Runkeeper app), how I use my time (just on Excel), and the quality of my sleep (Sleep Cycle app) and recording my thoughts in my own journal, which I do privately online (www.penzu.com). If you don't like using technology, you can simply keep records using a pen and paper—that's just as good and perhaps less stressful for you!

PRACTICE: Mindful Yoga and Meditation for Life



10 minutes.



30 minutes.

By now, you're familiar with the yoga sequences that have been offered to you. Today you're invited to practice in silence and to start the practice with a 5-minute standing body scan. You can use this body scan to find out which areas of your body are tense and require some attention, and which areas are relaxed. Then engage in whatever yoga postures you feel your body needs. Rather than thinking of the yoga practice as

something unusual that you do, allow the yoga stretches to feel like a natural process. Just as you naturally stretch your body in the morning in bed, stretch your body with mindful awareness to meet your body's current needs.

After practicing this for 10 or 30 minutes, depending on whether you're doing the mini or full course, go on to practice any mindfulness meditation of your choice. Again, try doing this without using the audio.

VARIATION: Just for a change, you could try practicing the meditation first and then doing the yoga. Notice what effect that has. Your level of mindful awareness in the yoga may increase.

The Daffodils

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
The thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Reflection: How Was Your Day of Mindfulness?

If you chose to have a day, or perhaps half-day, of mindfulness, how did you find the experience? What did you like or not like about it? What did you discover about your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, urges, and desires? If you plan to have another such day, do you wish to pop the date in your diary, or just see when it feels right?

Record your reflections in your journal, phone, or tablet.

Self-Care FAQs

Q: I'm already doing things for others all the time. Are you really suggesting I give more of myself?

A: If you're already giving your time to help others, you don't have to give any more. For you, perhaps you need to give less by saying no more often. But many people spend their time thinking about themselves and their own lives to feel better when actually seeking to help others would help themselves. This is because the brain is hardwired to reward you when you're generous with your time or energy. As the Dalai Lama says, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

Q: I literally have no spare time for mindfulness with my young baby and job. I'm on the go from morning till I fall asleep exhausted. What can I do?

A: If you have no spare slots to stop and practice a mindfulness exercise like the mindful pause, then don't worry! You can practice mindfulness as you are doing your daily activities. When you're looking at your child, pay attention to her eyes and body and gently smile at her rather than letting your mind get too lost in planning and worrying. When breastfeeding, be there with your child. When driving to the doctor for a checkup, feel your breath and notice the world around you, ensuring you switch off your phone and other distractions. Micro moments of mindfulness make a difference—a deep breath here, a mindful hug there—it all makes a huge difference.

Q: I'm anxious about this course ending. How can I prepare for the end?

A: This course isn't the end, really. If anything, it's the beginning of a

journey into a life of greater mindfulness. Seek to join a local mindfulness or meditation group in your area, and if there isn't one, consider an online mindfulness group, either mine or some other one that appeals. Perhaps in the near future, you can start a mindfulness group of your own to support others as well as yourself in the practice.

Q: I love the loving-kindness meditation! Can I just do that one?

A: Yes, you can! You can do any meditation you like. Different people like different meditations. They have all been found to be beneficial, so use what works for you or whatever you enjoy.

Q: Unfortunately, I never really got into the mindfulness practice in this book. I'm not good at sticking to things like this. What shall I do?

A: That's okay—you're not alone! There are two approaches you could take. You could closely watch your thoughts and find out what ideas you have that are preventing you from practicing the mindful experiments. And then begin by fully committing to doing 1 minute of meditation every day and building up from there. Alternatively, consider what hobbies or physical activity you do regularly and make that activity a mindful one. Even if it's knitting mindfully three or four times a week, that would be great.

Home Experiments: Week 7

This week, experiment with not using the guided audio when you meditate. Instead, just set a timer for however long you choose to meditate. And you can choose whatever meditation you prefer or feel would work best for you. If you find practicing without the audio too difficult, then try using the audio on alternate days.

Mindful Booster

This week, the mindful booster is to use the ABC approach to stress that you discovered in this chapter. To summarize it, A is awareness, so become aware of your stress signs, including thoughts, feelings, body, and behavior. Step B is about becoming aware of your breath and then also becoming aware of your beliefs about stress and shifting your thoughts to a more positive attitude toward the stress itself.

See your beating heart as strengthening you. Feel a faster breathing rate as oxygenating your brain and body. Finally, step C is choice. Choose a relaxing activity to lower stress to more manageable levels; or an energizing activity to channel your vitality; or face your stressor and try to fix things so your stress is effectively managed. Work with your stress rather than just trying to eliminate or run away from it.

Week 7

Day	Mini-Course	Full Course
1	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress
2	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress
3	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress
4	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress
5	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress
6	Any mini-meditation you like, without audio Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress	Any full meditation practice you like, without audio Mindful pause × 3 Mindful booster: Try the ABC approach to stress