



Self- care

-RESOURCE PACK-



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Dear Research Participant,

Below is lots of information that can help you to better understand the way your body functions and what happens when we are stressed. This document also includes some ideas to implement when you are feeling scared or angry or sad or emotional.

Remember that you are created in the most unique way and that there is no-one like you. Some ideas in this book will for you and some won't. You will have to find what is right for you.

If you feel that you are still “triggered” by the SAPPIN research, meaning that you keep on thinking about the questions and feeling physically different and uncontained, and the ideas mentioned in this document are not helping, please send an e-mail or phone Wilmi – wilmi@sappin.org.za / 0726734346 - so that we can find a therapist that can offer more support.

Warmly, SAPPIN

WHAT TO KNOW:

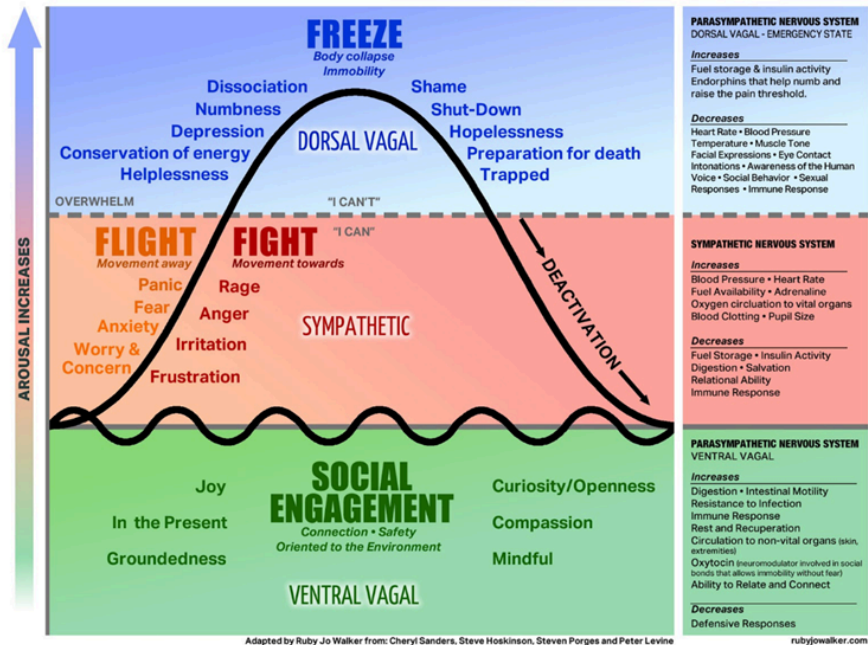
The fight or flight response is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived threat or danger. When faced with a stressful situation, the body releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which trigger a series of changes to prepare the body to either confront the threat (fight) or flee from it (flight).

During the fight or flight response, several changes happen in the body:

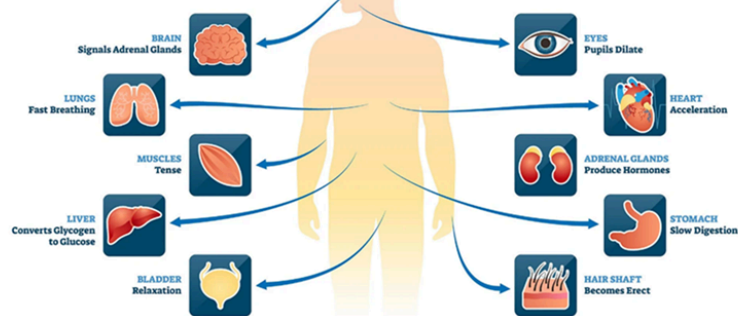
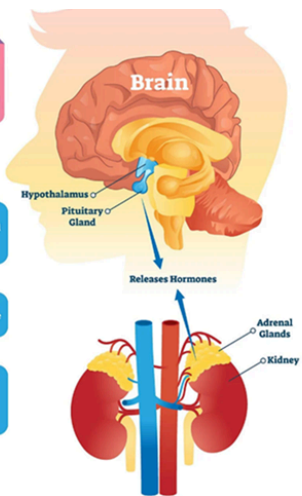
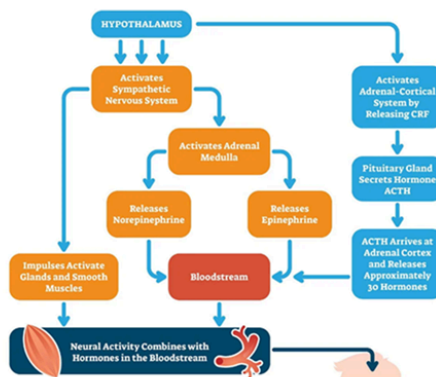
- Increased heart rate: The heart beats faster to pump blood to the muscles and vital organs, preparing the body for action.
- Rapid breathing: Breathing quickens to increase oxygen intake, providing energy to muscles and organs.
- Dilation of pupils: Pupils dilate to enhance vision, allowing for better detection of potential threats.
- Muscle tension: Muscles tense up to prepare for physical exertion, enabling the individual to either fight or flee effectively.
- Sweating: Sweat production increases to regulate body temperature during heightened activity.
- Suppression of non-essential functions: Digestion slows down, and certain bodily functions not immediately necessary for survival are temporarily suppressed.

These changes collectively prepare the body to respond quickly and effectively to perceived danger, enhancing the individual's chances of survival.

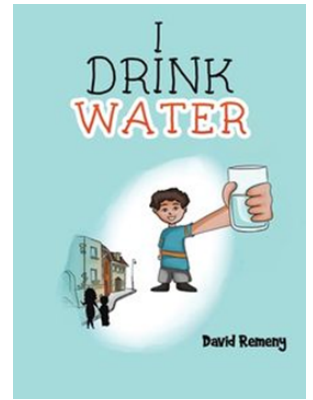




FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE



WHAT TO DRINK: WATER -



Water has a powerful physiological effect on your body – so much so that even drinking a glass of water can calm your nerves. This is because water triggers the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body's 'rest and digest' response. In this state, your heart rate and blood pressure lowers, your digestion is stimulated and your body is able to relax.

If drinking water doesn't immediately do the trick, pour water in a bowl, add a couple of ice cubes and immerse your face in the water. Do this numerous times.

Do NOT drink coffee or any other drink with stimulants such as energy drinks. It will only increase your heart rate and make you feel more anxious.


WHAT TO EAT:



Foods that are high in nutrients like magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, and antioxidants can help support the parasympathetic nervous system. Some examples include leafy greens, fatty fish like salmon, nuts and seeds, and fruits rich in antioxidants like berries.

Avocados, pilchards or other sardines

Unfortunately, not the carbs that make us feel warm and not the chocolates that make us feel loved.



WHAT TO DO:

Quick trick

What really helps when you feel anxious or triggered is to trick your brain by distracting it. The best way to do this is by using your senses: this is called the 54321 exercise -

5 things you can see

4 things that you can hear

3 things that you can touch

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste

Breathing

Breathing can have a powerful effect on our nervous system. The nervous system is the complex network that controls everything we feel and do. Breathing exercises can impact our nervous system in the following ways:

- Slowing your heart rate
- Lowering your blood pressure
- Increasing oxygen flow

When you practice deep breathing techniques regularly, your body starts to learn a new pattern. Over time, this can lead to a general feeling of calm and relaxation, making it easier to handle moments of anxiety when they arise.

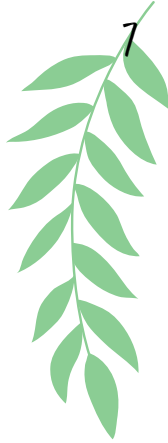
And the easiest way to do it is to take a 4-count breath in, hold that breath for 7 counts and breath out for 8 counts. We call this the 4-7-8 breathing technique and you can do it anytime, anywhere and you can do it until you are feeling better.

Or focus on making your exhale longer than your inhale. Start by inhaling for a count of four, then exhale slowly for a count of six or more. You can do this while sitting in your office chair or even lying in bed before you sleep. It can help to visualize your stress leaving your body with each extended exhale.

Choose a calming word or phrase and repeat it silently as you breathe in and out. This could be done while waiting in line or during a stressful moment at work. The key is to match the rhythm of your breath with your chosen word or phrase, creating a sense of calm focus.

Exercise

Stretching exercises



1. Stretching our body

- Stretch arms straight upwards as if you want to touch heaven
- Stretch to both sides.
- Stretch to the front.
- Stretch to the back.

2. Head and neck

- Stretch the right arm up and place your head on your right shoulder, and your hand on your ear. Hold for four breath counts.
- Stretch your left arm up and place your head on your left shoulder, and your hand on your ear. Hold for four breath counts.
- Place your chin on your chest. Slowly roll your head up so that your right ear is close to your right shoulder. Slowly roll your head back.
- Do the same with the left shoulder. Do this 4 times in each direction.

3. Shoulders

- Roll your shoulders forward (5 times)
- Roll your shoulders backwards (5 times)
- Shrug your shoulders up to your ears while inhaling, pinch your eyes closed, and hold your breath.
- We strain your shoulders as you relax your body. (3 times)

4. Arms

- Relax your arms and let them swing in the same direction. Your arms should swing from your shoulders, not your elbows. These are good for your lower back.
- Relax your arms and let your arms swing to the sides, while twisting your torso. Your arms should gently touch your back as you turn from side to side.

5. Middle: Hold your waist and make small circular motions in both directions (4 circular movements in each direction)

6. Knees

- Bend your knees slightly and, holding them with both hands, make small circles to both sides.
- Keep your knees bent (4 times in each direction)

7. Feet and Ankles

- Place one foot in front of the other and make small circles with the ankles. Remember to turn to both sides.
- Do each foot 4 times in each direction.

8. Hands and joints: Twist your joints as if you were painting, both sides in and out.

9. Shake the whole body: Move your body high, low, waist and all around. Have a good one!

10. Take note of how your body feels.





Walking



Walking helps boost your mood because it increases blood flow and blood circulation to the brain and body. It has a positive influence on your hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which is your central nervous response system. This is good because the HPA axis is responsible for your stress response. When you exercise by walking, you calm your nerves, which can make you feel less stressed.

Swimming



Evidence indicates that regular physical activity, in general, boosts your mood, helps you cope with stress, and reduces your signs of anxiety. Swimming is no exception.

Research shows that swimming consistently helps reduce signs of anxiety by helping you manage the stress response. The release of endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine also helps you feel more at ease. Swimming may also help you feel more grounded because, besides having the benefits of physical activity, it may engage your senses, which can help you manage anxiety.

Dancing

Dancing reduces stress and anxiety. When you dance, you are releasing endorphins and other positive hormones into your system. This can help to reduce stress and anxiety levels.



Mindfulness

The basic premise underlying mindfulness practices is that experiencing the present moment nonjudgmentally and openly can effectively counter the effects of stressors, because excessive orientation toward the past or future when dealing with stressors can be related to feelings of depression and anxiety.

Become aware of your surroundings through your 5 senses but in a way that you accept yourself 100%





Meditation

Meditation can wipe away the day's stress, bringing with it inner peace. See how you can easily learn to practice meditation whenever you need it most. If stress has you anxious, tense and worried, you might try meditation. Spending even a few minutes in meditation can help restore your calm and inner peace.

Find the meditation practice that feels comfortable for you. There are many different links on You Tube for meditations that will work within your belief system.

Guided Meditation

Find a comfortable sitting position with your feet flat on the floor and your hands relaxed in your laps. Back upright yet relaxed. Shoulders dropped and neck long with your head gently floating up towards the sky.

If you feel comfortable, allow your eyes to close.

[Pause]

Noticing what is happening for you now. What is your experience in this moment?

[Pause]

Noticing what thoughts are going through your mind.

[Pause]

Noticing how you feel?

[Pause]

Noticing how your body feels today.

[Pause]

Noticing that you are breathing.

[Pause]

Each breath passing through your nose or mouth, filling the lungs and stomach, and then emptying out through your nose or mouth.

[Pause]

Just try to notice what your experience is like without making a judgment about it.

Whatever it is, it is okay.

[Pause]

Bringing your attention to your feet. Notice which parts of the feet are touching the floor. Bringing your attention to each toe.

[Pause]

Notice the arches of your feet.

[Pause]

Your heel.

[Pause]

Your whole foot. [Pause]

Noticing any temperature, tension, or pain in your feet.

[Pause]

If you can't feel your feet, that is okay. Just notice that lack of feeling.

[Pause]

Now, as you breathe in, imagine your breath traveling down through your body and into your feet.

[Pause]

As you breathe out, allow your breath to leave your feet letting go of any tension.

[Pause]

Move your attention to your ankles. Notice how your ankles feel today.

[Pause]

As you breathe in, imagine your breath filling your ankles.

[Pause]

As you breathe out, allow your breath to leave your ankles letting go of any tension.

[Pause]

Now, moving your attention to your calves. Notice how your calves feel today.

[Pause]

If your mind begins to wander and start thinking of something, gently with kindness return to the focused attention of your calves or whatever part of the body we are noticing.

[Pause]

Whatever you are feeling, it is okay.

[Pause]

If you notice any tension, use the breath to bring awareness to the feeling and notice if there is any relaxation when you breathe in and out to that part of the body.

Move through calves, knees, thighs, hips, midsection, lower back, stomach, upper back, chest, shoulders, hands, wrists, arms, neck, face (jaw, mouth, tongue, nose, eyes, forehead), ears, head.

Now bring awareness to the entire body.

[Pause]

Imagine that each breath passes through your body from head to toe and then empties out from toe to head.

[Pause]

3. Finishing

Now noticing what thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations you are experiencing.

[Pause]

Notice if there is any difference between your experience now and before you did the Body Relaxation.

[Pause]

Take a moment to thank yourself for taking the time to simply be with your own body and allow it to relax.

[Pause]

Whenever you are ready, you can open your eyes.





Breathing meditation

This breathing awareness relaxation script will guide you to focus on each stage of a breath as you breathe slowly and gently.

Let's begin. Throughout this breathing awareness exercise, breathe in this way:

Breathe in to the count of four, hold for the count of 3, and breathe out to the count of 5.

It goes like this:

Breathe in...2....3....4..... hold...2...3....exhale...2...3....4....5...

Breathe in...2....3....4..... hold...2...3....exhale...2...3....4....5...

Breathe in...2....3....4..... hold...2...3....exhale...2...3....4....5...

Breathe in...2....3....4..... hold...2...3....exhale...2...3....4....5...

Continue to breathe at this slow pace.

While you are breathing slowly, I'll direct your breathing awareness to different stages of the breath.

Focus all of your attention on each stage I mention.

First, notice the breath as it enters your nose. Notice each time you breathe in, the way the breath feels on your nostrils.

Feel the breath as it passes through your nasal passages, and down behind your throat.

Where does the air go next? Feel each time you inhale, the breath passing down your windpipe.

Feel the breath going down.....

Feel the breath going down....

Notice where the air enters your lungs. Allow your breathing awareness to deepen the feeling of relaxation you are experiencing.

Feel the air expand your lungs with each in breath.

Feel your lungs expand... and relax.... expand.... and relax..... expand.... and relax.....

Now notice the exhalation phase of breathing. Observe as the air leaves your lungs and begins to travel upward. Focus your attention on that moment of each breath.

Now turn your attention to the breath traveling up and out, through your mouth. Feel the breath in your throat, your mouth, and across your lips.

Notice each breath as a whole now. See how the breaths flow like waves. In.... and then a pause.... and out.... and then a pause.... Notice the pauses, these rests between breaths.

Now as you relax... you can count your breaths as they continue to flow gently. Count 10 breaths.

(pause)

When you are finished counting your breaths, notice how calm and relaxed you are. See how regular your breathing has become... how calm your breathing is.

When you are ready to return to your day, you can reawaken your body and return to the present. I'll count to five. With each number, you can become more and more alert, reaching full alertness when I reach 5.

1 2 3 4 5

Sleep

Resetting emotions happens in REM sleep, when activity in most brain regions is similar to when we're awake. By reactivating memories during REM sleep, the associated feelings can be removed from the content of the memory. This is why "sleeping on it" really can help you feel better in the morning.



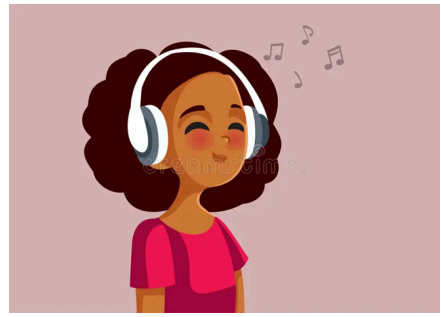
Sing

Singing is really good to release trauma. It's even better for your brain and even better for processing trauma if you're singing in a group. Those of us who sing in a group are working on our trauma - and we all have trauma, every single person on earth has trauma - without even [consciously having to process the trauma.]



If you're looking for a low-intensity way to process some trauma, I encourage you to sing with a group. Even if you're not ready to directly process your trauma, it's good for you, it's good for helping your brain activate different centers so it can unconsciously process things, and great for your wellbeing overall.

Hum



One of the best things about humming is that anyone can do it! Try humming along to a song and see how you feel. Because humming often increases the length of exhalation for each breath, you may find that humming combined with deep breathing is an easy way to de-stress wherever you are. To enhance this experience is to hum with others. If you feel comfortable with others, stand or sit in a group and hum the same song together.

EXTRA RESOURCES:

Some useful Youtube Videos:

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1U3cl2QxHw>

Vegas Nerve Activation - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUx5kLFyx-M&list=TLPQMDQwNTlwMjQJbutQSU2A&index=2>

Fight, flight, freeze response explained - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEHwB1PG_-Q

Trauma, triggers and dysregulation - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hGosi3tsjl>

Please contact us for access to a list of helpful PDFs about self-care!

Please contact Wilmi on wilmi@sappin.org.za for more information.