Welcome to Week 4

New things

If you are feeling stressed and down, it’s easy to get into a cycle where you end up believing that nothing will ever get any better. Often you can end up feeling completely overwhelmed. You might end up dwelling on the big life changes which you may need to make and feeling that it is just impossible. So big things seem impossible and you end up not even doing little things.

Here is a simple way of breaking that cycle. And it’s fun. (I often do it just for the fun of it)

What I’m suggesting that you do is make some little changes. They can be absolutely tiny and it will make a difference.

Choose just one of these every few days. Any one, no particular order. Whatever you fancy. Or add any new ones you want. Let me know about any good new ones which work for you.

**Buy new clothes**

A colour or style you wouldn’t usually wear.

**Change your route and routine**

Do you go to work the same way every day? Change your route. Then change where you fill up the car and the supermarket you go to. Then alter the way you take the kids to school. Any routine which can change, change it. Give it a go.

**Read a new book**

If you read a lot, choose something which you would NEVER DREAM of picking up. If you like it, tell other people about it.

**Get active in your community**

Support a local cause, or do some fundraising for a local charity. Altruism feels good, focusing outside of yourself lifts your mood. And you will be helping others.

**Lifelong learning**

Learn a new skill. It doesn’t matter what, but pick something you have always wanted to do if you can. Getting out and taking a class at your local college will help you meet other people. But if you can’t manage that, then take on online course.

**TV Heaven**

If you watch TV, and most of us do. Get the schedules at the beginning of the week and choose a couple of programmes which you wouldn’t normally watch. If you like them tell all your friends.

**Get out and about**

You don’t have to take a mountaineering course. Just a stroll around the park is a start. The important thing is to get out in nature. Nature is great.



Mindful meditation and how to do it

Mindfulness and mindful meditation had become very fashionable. But don’t let that put you off. It is simple, many people find it really effective. And you can do it anywhere. This exercise teaches basic mindfulness meditation.

**Practising mindfulness meditation**

Sit on a straight-backed chair or cross-legged on the floor.

Focus on an aspect of your breathing, such as the sensations of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth, or your belly rising and falling as you inhale and exhale.

Once you’ve narrowed your concentration in this way, begin to widen your focus. Become aware of sounds, sensations, and your ideas.

Embrace and consider each thought or sensation without judging it good or bad. If your mind starts to race, return your focus to your breathing. Then expand your awareness again.

It’s a simple as that. But it does take a bit of patience. And be kind to yourself, don’t get upset with yourself if your mind drifts off. Just gently bring it back, regard it as interesting and enjoy it as you slowly build up control and find it easier to direct your thoughts.

That’s it, it is as simple as that!

**Practise makes mndful**

The effects of mindfulness meditation tend to increase the more you do it. And take some time. For most people about 20 minutes is needed for the full effects to be felt, especially when you are new to the technique.

**Once you get good at it, try this**

We often live anywhere but in our own life. So you will cook the dinner while thinking about your work, or bath the baby while worrying about what you will cook for dinner. Why not try living in the here and now for once?

This is just a thought habit which you can build up over time.

Whatever you are doing concentrate on it. Be aware of the physical sensations you are getting while you are doing it. Notice how what you are doing looks. Feel how anything you are handling feels, the texture the temperature. You can do this anytime, with anything, whatever you are doing. It is often best to start practising this technique with very dull very routine things, you will have less expectations invested in them and this can make it easier. So live in the moment of the washing up. You’ll be surprised at what you can see in the bubbles.

There are loads of resources which can tell you more. This is one I like <http://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>