

## **Jamison: Patient Education and Wellness**

### **HANDOUT 18.5: STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH ACUTE STRESS**

Anxiety screening tool

[http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_anxiety screener](http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_anxiety screener)

### **TIPS FOR SLOWING DOWN AND BEING CALM**

#### **TIPS TO HELP YOU SLOW DOWN**

Force yourself to do things slowly:

- ☐ speak slowly
- ☐ walk slowly
- ☐ think slowly
- ☐ breathe slowly

Take your time

#### **TIPS FOR ASSUMING A CALM POSTURE:**

- ☐ Lotus Hands:
  - shake your arms, wrists and hands to release tension
  - clasp and unclasp your fingers to heighten awareness of tension
  - rest your hands on your lap or desk and gently rest the tip of the thumb and each finger on the corresponding finger of the other hand
- ☐ The Frown Release:
  - frown
  - raise your eyebrows
  - repeat this sequence until your forehead feels relaxed
- ☐ The Calm Stance:
  - stand tall with your arms and hands hanging beside your body, shoulders back and chin up
  - imagine a helium balloon is attached to the top of your head – feel it stretching you skywards
  - when comfortable, breathe abdominally
  - retain this posture for several minutes

This stance can be assumed when sitting, standing or walking. It can even be used when driving!

*If you slow your behaviour, your mind calms down too.*

### **BREATHING**

Breathing tips:

- ☐ Sigh for relaxation

Yawning or sighing releases tension:

- sit or stand up straight

- sigh deeply
- repeat the above 8 to 10 times whenever you feel tense

☐ Do abdominal breathing

Abdominal breathing involves:

- breathing in through your nose. Your abdomen rises
- pausing and imagining the oxygen flowing to all parts of the body
- breathing out through your mouth; sigh on the exhale. Your abdomen falls
- feel the tension leaving your body as you exhale

Self-check:

Place your hand on your stomach. Feel it move up as you breathe in and down as you breathe out.

Focus on getting your diaphragmatic breathing right.

☐ Regulate your breathing rate

- slow your breathing to a calm and comfortable rate
- it may help to count

Routinely spend 1 minute three times each day doing this exercise.

Count the number of times you breathe in and out (1 cycle) over 30 seconds.

If you are breathing more than 12 cycles per minute, you are still stressed.

*Correct breathing has a calming effect..*

## MUSCLE RELAXATION

Tips for general relaxing:

☐ The Hang Loose One Minute Relaxation Routine (1):

- sit comfortably with both feet comfortably on the floor
- let your eyes close gently
- take a deep breath and hold it for as long as you can
- then breathe out gently
- while you are breathing think:
  - fingers loose
  - shoulders heavy/relaxed
  - jaw loose (teeth slightly apart)

☐ The Calm Unfold (2):

- stand upright. Imagine a string attached to the top of your head lifting you to the ceiling
- drop your chin to your chest
- breathing out, roll your spine forward (one segment at a time):
  - let your shoulders drop
  - let your chest roll forward
  - dangle your arms, wrists, fingers
- stay in this relaxed forward dangle as long as it is comfortable
- reverse the process, unrolling the lower spine, chest, neck
- resume the upright position

☐ The Helicopter Stretch

- hold your arms out horizontally
- shake your hands and let them hang loose
- gently swing your arms in a semi-circle

☐ The Windmill Stretch

- hang your arms by your sides
- sweep them up in a wide arc so that your hands meet above your head
- breathe in when your arms are level with your shoulders
- swing your arms down and breathe out as your hands cross at your waist

☐ Deep muscle relaxation

This involves alternate muscle tensing and relaxing:

- tighten up all the muscles in both hands
- count slowly to 3 while you clench your fists
- let your hands relax, feeling the tension draining out of the fingers
- feel your hands become heavy as you repeat the exercise three times

Perform this exercise using different muscle groups, e.g. shoulder, leg

## COMBINATION EXERCISES

Tips for relaxing mind and body:

☐ Combined breathing and deep muscle relaxation

- tune in to your breathing: take a deep breath, hold it, breathe out and tell yourself to let go
- as you breathe in, tighten your fists; breathe out and relax your hands. Feel the tension leaving your body
- drop your shoulders

☐ Combined breathing and rocking

- sit in a straight chair
- do abdominal breathing
- hug yourself/wrap your arms around your body
- slowly rock backwards and forwards from the waist

☐ Combined strategies for calmness

- slow down and be calm
- use diaphragmatic breathing
- relax tense muscles
- massage trigger points (Handout 18.7)