

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)

You are being given this information sheet because your treating team has suggested that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) may be helpful in your treatment. This information sheet aims to answer your questions about MBSR. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives to MBSR to help you decide whether or not you wish to use this treatment.

If after reading this information sheet you have any further questions, please contact the MBSR trainer Dr Thomas Ernst on t: 020 7188 2516 or e: thomas.ernst@gstt.nhs.uk.

Why should I have MBSR?

MBSR has been developed specifically to help people cope with and improve long-lasting physical symptoms, such as chronic pain and other bodily symptoms caused by chronic illness. MBSR can also help to relieve a range of conditions and their consequences, such as stress and anxiety, sleep problems and daytime fatigue, headaches, migraine, tension headaches and irritable bowel syndrome. It has also been used successfully as an alternative to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in the management of depression. It is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for the prevention of relapse into depression.

MBSR can help reduce stress hormone levels, and this can be helpful in the management of simple faints and associated dizziness. It can also be used as a complementary treatment (in addition to standard medical care), to help you deal with stresses originating from things beyond your control, such as:

- long term conditions, especially where there are chronic pains or distressing symptoms
- life events and job stresses
- the stresses of being a carer
- anxiety (regardless of the cause)
- sleep problems.

What is 'mindfulness' and what is MBSR?

Mindfulness is about paying attention in the here and now in a non-judgemental way. This means not judging, analysing or trying to change the situation, but accepting the situation for what it is in that moment. A mindfulness-based approach teaches you practical skills on how to do this.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction, or MBSR, consists of a number of exercises that can be learnt fairly easily by listening to audio recordings and following their instructions at the same time. MBSR exercises are taken from traditional meditation and are similar to yoga for the mind, but without the religious context. Those who wish to use their faith within MBSR are free to do so.

How do I carry out MBSR?

No special preparation is necessary for MBSR. Initially you will be seen face-to-face by the MBSR trainer who will explain the MBSR exercises. You will be given either CDs or downloadable mp3 files containing a full and detailed explanation of the exercises. You will be encouraged to take these away with you so that you can practice the exercises at home. To do the exercises, you should either be sitting comfortably upright in a chair or lying down. The recordings will make some suggestions at the beginning of each exercise.

If you can, you should avoid drinks containing caffeine (such as coffee or Red Bull), as well as alcohol and other sedatives (such as sleeping tablets or tranquilizers) before the exercises. The reason for this is that they may make MBSR more difficult to carry out and may therefore make it less effective.

The MBSR exercises can be divided up into four groups:

1. **Body scanning** – This is a mindfulness exercise where you pay attention to the sensations from the different parts of your body. This is usually done lying down or sitting up. There are 20 minute and 40 minute body scan recordings.
2. **Sitting meditations** – The purpose of this exercise is to observe the mind wandering away from a focus, such as breathing, and then gently bringing it back to simply observing the breathing, and repeating this for as many times as you notice it happen. The recordings offer a 3 minute, 20 minute and 40 minute exercise to choose from.
3. **Mindful movements** – This is about accepting and observing the sensations in your body as it moves slowly and stretches. The exercise takes 35 minutes and requires the ability to balance on one leg and carry out movements on the floor. We recommend that you try the exercises you feel comfortable doing and leave out those you cannot do or feel uncomfortable doing.
4. **Mindful tasks** – This means becoming aware of the physical sensations of a task, such as walking or eating. There is a **mindful walking** exercise within the recordings.

In all exercises, the aim is to try to experience the sensations in the body:

- without judging what is felt as either good or bad
- without trying to change a sensation (for example, making a pain feel better by moving)
- without trying to analyse a sensation (for example, where a sensation comes from).

The general rule of all of the exercises is that the instructions given are a guide only. **If any of the exercises are painful or uncomfortable you should stop doing them and discuss the exercise with your doctor or the MBSR trainer, Dr Ernst.**

All of the exercises follow a three stage process. This involves:

- (1) being aware and accepting of the bodily sensations created by the immediate environment (orientation phase)
- (2) observing and accepting the natural movements in the abdomen created by the breath, and
- (3) accepting what you are experiencing within the whole body, which may include sensations experienced in (1) and (2).

This three stage process is often referred to as 'hourglass' meditation (see Diagram 1 on page 5 of this leaflet).

It is natural to experience resistance towards the exercises after the initial period (for example, not finding the time to do the exercises or being too tired). However, overcoming this resistance is an important part of the therapy.

As MBSR requires your **full attention** and is often quite demanding on your mind, you may wish to relax for a short while after the exercise has finished.

Are there any alternatives?

MBSR is usually suggested in addition to standard medical care. MBSR is sometimes used on its own as a first line treatment before considering other types of treatments that may have more side effects. However, your options will be discussed in full at your clinic appointment with the MBSR trainer, Dr Ernst.

Are there any side effects?

MBSR has no known side effects and has been used for more than 5000 years.

If you are concerned about anything you experience during your exercises, you should discuss it with your doctor or the MBSR trainer to ensure there is no physical cause for your symptoms.

Occasionally, people may experience memories of past unpleasant events during the exercises. These thoughts often subside as a result of doing the exercises repeatedly, with practice allowing thoughts to become less intrusive over time. If you feel that MBSR is an emotionally negative experience for you, then you may simply wish to stop and/or speak to your doctor about other ways of dealing with this situation, such as counselling.

Some people can feel that MBSR is interfering with their belief systems. If this is the case for you, you may choose not to engage with this treatment.

MBSR is an 'acceptance and commitment' based therapy. You will be asked to accept any sensations you experience in your body as you are completing the exercises, and commit to the exercises fully in spite of the various distractions that you may encounter. If you find this difficult due to the intensity of any pain you already have, you should discuss adequate pain relief with your doctor before starting MBSR. Provided the origin of your pain is clear and familiar to you, there is no risk. **However, if you experience any new or unfamiliar pain or discomfort during MBSR, you should stop practising MBSR and discuss your symptoms with your doctor.** MBSR should only be used with chronic and fully investigated symptoms and **never** with any sudden or acute pain.

Giving my consent (permission)

It is up to you whether you wish to try out this treatment or not. If you decide to go ahead with the treatment, you can stop at any point without giving a reason. This will not affect your healthcare in any way.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

A face-to-face follow-up appointment with the MBSR trainer will be arranged for three months after your initial teaching session. Most people are able to carry out MBSR by themselves by listening to the recordings. However, if you need further support or information in between the teaching session and the follow-up appointment, additional appointments can be arranged with Dr Ernst on **020 71882516** or by e-mail at **thomas.ernst@gstt.nhs.uk**

What should I do if I have a problem?

If you experience any unpleasant symptoms that you are not familiar with, please report these to your doctor. If you have any problems carrying out the exercises, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Ernst using the details listed above.

Out of hours, please contact your GP as usual, or you can call Dr Ernst directly on 07843462317 during reasonable morning and evening hours.

Further information

Self help book:

- Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World (with free CD), by Mark Williams

Online courses:

- www.bemindful.co.uk
- www.learning-modern-meditation.com/meditation-timer.html
- www.londoninsightmeditation.org.uk
- www.getsomeheadspace.com
- www.mindfulness.org
- www.mindfulnet.org

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Direct

Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 0845 4647 **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Diagram 1

Mindfulness meditations follow an 'hourglass' pattern from the start to the finish.

