

“Tools for Life” Workshop

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This workshop aims to promote awareness of:

1. The body
2. The mind
3. Anxiety and low mood
4. Sleep hygiene

First off: there is no general solution. These are hints and suggestions, but ultimately these are guidelines for each person to discover what helps them. You know best what helps you.

For both your body and your mind there are three steps:

- 1.) Become aware of what hurts and what feels good. Track your daily activities to understand how they affect you.
- 2.) Make small changes to your activities based on these insights. By preparing yourself and establishing routines you are better prepared for more intense moments.
- 3.) Devise strategies to reduce the toll of intense experiences. For events that are predictable, have ways that reduce tension already during the preparation.

Body awareness

- Take time to focus on your body
 - perhaps place a sticker on your computer reminding you to pause and reflect on your body
 - think about aches or pains or discomforts and how to sooth them
 - do stretches at your desk, of your fingers, arms etc
 - consider your body's basic needs: water, air, sunshine, bathroom etc.

Mind awareness

- We are far more accepting of physical injuries than mental issues
- Remember – feelings are useful, they contain information
 - don't try to suppress or ignore or become frustrated about your feelings
 - we need to interpret and respond correctly
 - feeling -> understanding of the feeling -> what can be done/what do I need?
- Think about the little things that give you enjoyment or satisfaction
 - If you keep hold of these and keep enjoying them, it is much harder to feel low

- Compared to large changes (e.g. planning to go running three times a week), small changes (e.g. making tea for yourself or a colleague) are easier to integrate and have less risk to lead to additional stress or dissatisfaction.
- Some studies suggest that there are five ways to increase your wellbeing: (i) connect (ii) be active (iii) take notice (iv) keep learning (v) give. Try to include such activities (e.g. walk up and down the corridor) in your daily rhythm, and remind yourself of how they help you
- Structure your day, compartmentalise your tasks, pause for a moment before stressful tasks (eg opening emails)

Anxiety

- Is a normal response to a perceived threat
- It is common and many people experience it
- It is short-term and will not last
- It is a threat response, often to social threats. The triggers for it (feelings of “being found out”, “being a failure”, “how will this affect my future”) are frequent occurrences for postdocs, and there are reasons for why you and (almost) everyone else feel this way.
- If possible, learn to accept that you are not experiencing these feelings because of something that is wrong with you, but because of the situation. During these situations, which are generally beyond your own control, remind yourself of your own goals you want to reach by being there.
- Deal with the feelings by treating yourself as if you were your own baby or your own best friend: you would not shout or tell them how stupid they are, but listen and provide support
- To stop an anxiety attack becoming serious:
 - Breathe from lower in your chest, deeply and slowly
 - Distract yourself! Eg count red objects in the room and then go for a walk to calm down
 - Avoidance of anxiety-causing issues is not a solution, and prolongs anxiety!
 - After an attack, be physical to release the chemicals from your muscles.
- To avoid anxiety, eg before an interview:
 - Visualise how you can confidently, competently carry out the task
 - How would you enter the room? How would you walk, talk, interact? What would your body language be like?
 - Then act out your visualisation
 - Practice. For some people it helps to rehearse in front of an audience they consider to be even more critical than the one they are going to face in the real situation.

Sleep hygiene

- A regular rhythm appears to help:
 - Wake up at the same time. This appears to be more important to find a rhythm than going to sleep at a fixed time.
 - Create a bed time routine, that includes relaxation, but ideally no screens
 - The bed is for sleeping (and sex): associate your bed with sleep by not using it as a couch during other parts of the day

- If you wake up in the middle of the night:
 - Do not get anxious: while it might not be pleasant to not get a lot of sleep, it is okay. You get more sleep than you think, and usually your body will catch up.
 - Try not to look at the clock, relax, for example by focusing on your breathing

If you are finding it difficult to cope, contact the University Counselling Service (do not wait until things are really serious – contact them early!) or search for Dignity @ Work.