CBT

+ Light

for Women

with Breast Cancer

**Email module 3**

This module will provide information on staying present, anchoring your

attention and calming your mind. Practising these techniques will help you feel calmer and quiet your mind before bed.

**Staying present – mind and body**

Today, we introduce Part 1, "Staying Present", and next week, we will describe Part 2, "Relaxation for Your Body". We hope you will practise and apply these tools on a daily basis.

**An Active Mind**can keep us awake at night, even if the body is tired and sleepy. An active mind rarely stays present, where your body is, here and now.

**Thoughts about:**

* The **past** could bring sadness, regret, or anger
* The **future** could bring anxiety and stress.
* Think about the last time an active mind was keeping you awake. Were you thinking about what had happened in the past? Or perhaps about what might happen in the future?

**Try-It-Now**:   
If you pause for a moment, you might realize that:

* Everything going through your mind about the **past**, **or the future, is** **not actually happening right now**, for real.
* Yet you are having the same feelings as if they are part of your reality.

These thoughts and feelings can get in the way of good sleep and mental health.

**How to Stay Present?**

**Staying Present** (sometimes called being mindful) means paying attention to what’s happening here and now, in a non-judgmental way. Staying present guides an active mind back to the here and now, so it doesn’t stay active in the past or the future.

**Your mind and body work together to produce sleep, and they work best when they are together, in one place – here and now.**People who practise staying present on a regular basis also experience other benefits, such as feeling calmer, and having more positive feelings.

**Staying Present is a skill that can be learned and cultivated over time. Patience and regular practice will take you a long way.**

**There are 2 parts to this practice:**

**1. Anchor your Attention to Here and Now**

Purposefully anchor your attention to here and now.  The most common **focus (or anchors)** for your attention are the **Breath**, and the **Body**.  They are excellent anchors, because they are with us wherever we go, and can be a permanent home for our mind to return to.  It is also easier for our mind to hold an anchor in focus, when it moves in a subtle and dynamic way, as our breath and body both do.   
  
As you pay attention to your breath or body, be gentle on yourself, and let go of any judgment or expectation about what you should or should not feel.  Your primary task is to observe where your attention focuses, like an astronaut looking at the earth from above.

**2. Gently Direct Your Wandering Mind**

Whenever your mind wanders (yes, it happens often for everyone!), **gently direct it back to your anchor (breath or body)**, whether it is the next breath you are taking in, or a particular part of the body you are paying attention to.   
  
Being distracted and wandering away from your anchor is natural, so be very patient with yourself.  When you catch your mind wandering, this is a mindful moment.  **Congratulate yourself, and gently bring your mind back to your anchor**, and simply continue from where you were.  Those moments when you notice your mind wandering, and respond by gently bringing it back, are moments to cherish, because you are learning a new skill, a skill you can carry with you every day.

**Each moment you guide your mind back to the here and now, that moment is made different.**

**You can practice staying present to help manage these cancer-specific symptoms that impact sleep**

**Click here to practice a short mindfulness exercise (exploring the breath)**

**Click here to practice a longer mindfulness and breathing exercise (breath and sounds)**

**Shortness of Breath**

Shortness of breath may wake you during the night. Reduce factors that worsen shortness of breath (eg avoid full meals just prior to bed, do things to minimise stress and anxiety). If shortness of breath is due to panic or anxiety, relaxation and calm-mind strategies may be useful. Practice focusing on the breath and anchoring your attention to your breath and your body. Engage in pursed-lip breathing (slow and deep in-breath through nose and slow out-breath through mouth). Other helpful relaxation techniques will be covered next week.

**Dealing with arousing medications – e.g., dexamethasone** – Some cancer medications have a stimulating effect and will stop you from sleeping. Trying to sleep at normal times when taking these medications may only lead to worse frustration and stress. Instead, accept that sleep will be disrupted for a few days, and plan to engage in restful activities outside of the bedroom when not sleeping. Focusing on the breath, anchoring the attention to your body and quietening your mind will help you maintain peaceful and calming feelings. A quiet and calm mind will make it easier to sleep when tiredness eventually comes.

**Reminders:**

Wear your light glasses for 30 minutes when you wake up in the morning at your usual rise time, and when you feel tired during the day. Remember not to drive when wearing the glasses.

Go to bed only when you are sleepy, and not too early.

Keep the bedroom just for sleeping; eat, read, work or watch TV in other rooms of the house.

A quiet mind helps us to fall asleep at night. To help quieten your mind, anchor your thoughts to your breath and body.