Habits & Routine – aiding your mental health on a daily basis

"Good habits, once established are just as hard to break as are bad habits"

Let's re-set and refresh ourselves, carry out this simple task to bring you back into your body by carrying out this simple body scanning technique:

You need to focus on each different body part in turn, checking in. Thinks – How are they feeling? Are you holding in any tension?

Move down your body and concentrate to try to consciously relax each of these in isolation.

- Start at your head, then cover each section as follows:
    o Eyes
    o Jaw
    o Neck
    o Shoulders
    o Back
    o Chest
    o Arms
    o Stomach
    o Hips
    o Legs
    o Feet
    o Toes

Once you have completed this exercise, you will have identified your areas of tension and be more comfortable.

You can use this technique whenever you feel tense and it should help you to move into the rest of the day feeling grounded and confident.

Humans are creatures of habit. That's not to say we don't like spontaneity and surprises – but following a routine not only gives comfort but establishes habits that can last a lifetime.

When we do something that is habitual, we are not engaged in the task as much as if it was not a habit. Imagine opening your iPhone to check your emails – totally effortless. Now imagine using your friends Samsung to do the same. You are so much more engaged because this is not a habit, therefore you are having to focus more.

Habits can be healthy or unhealthy. Both are hard to change because they are so ingrained, they are almost automatic.

Tips to change unhealthy habits:
1. **Stop justifying unhealthy habits** – "lockdown is so depressing it's ok I don't open my curtains, sleep all day and stay up at night".

2. **Love yourself** – you are of value. You don't need to hit rock bottom, the time is now. There is a great Chinese proverb "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now."

3. **Identify what you want to change** - by bringing what is unconscious and generally ignored to your awareness. It's not about beating yourself up about how useless you are and how many "bad" habits you have. Just make a list and pick one you would like to change. Tackle

one at a time so you don' get overwhelmed. A small change is better than no change at all.

4. **How does your unhealthy habit serve you? -** Comfort in food? Escapism through video games? Validation through social media? Numbness in alcohol? Identifying the underlying benefit of the behaviour enables you to successfully find a healthy alternative. **E.g. –** *You are keep your phone next to you during online lectures and are often distracted by notifications popping up. This will mean you lose concentration during a time where you are meant to be processing information and learning. A way to change this habit would be to create a new one where you either a) turn your phone off completely during lectures or B) lock it away in the safe in your room.*

5. **Be prepared & remove triggers.** If you know you comfort eat late at night, have an alternative so when the habit presents itself you have healthy options to eat instead or an alternative strategy such as exercise or breathing.

6. **Be wise** – e.g. you feel like you have no downtime, so you stay up late watching Netflix. You know you will be exhausted and less productive the next day – but you feel "entitled". Your wisdom knows this is not a healthy way to get "me" time. Listen to that wisdom to build healthy me time into your schedule.

7. **Visualize yourself changing** - Serious visualisation can retrain your brain. Envisage yourself with the new habit – eating healthily, sleeping well, being fit, being really confident. The more you think about something, the more wired in your brain it becomes.

8. **Stop negative self-talk** - Retrain the judgemental brain. I'm useless, I'll never do it, I always fail, I'm so unfit. Listen to how you speak to yourself and reframe it. "I'm not useless – I just wasn't very good at that, but I can try again". "I'm not fit, but I'm working at getting fitter". Listen to how you speak to yourself – would you speak to a friend like that?

9. **Take baby steps** - It doesn't have to be all or nothing. If you had planned half an hours exercise in the morning but you slept in, don't worry – just do 15 minutes. You're still enforcing the habit.

10. **Accept that you will sometimes falter** - Habits don't change overnight. Love yourself each time you do and remind yourself that you are human.

11. **Know that it will take time** - It is suggested habits take *on average* 66 days to change. The bundles of nerves in your brain take time to change the default settings. Be patient, and remember this is an average – you could take longer or shorter.

Take 5 minutes to identify 2 small habits you think you can alter for the better.

1
Habit
Alteration

2
Habit
Alteration

Routine

During the COVID-19 pandemic it has been easy to lose track of time. Your usual walk to Uni for lectures, nights out and clubs have been replaced with lockdowns and quarantines. With the loss of our normal routine, many have been left with feelings of uncertainty and a lack of structure that can contribute to stress, anxiety, and even clinical depression.

Why routines are important for everyone:

Routine represents expectations and patterns that are an important component of good mental health. Even simple ones can be important anchors to maintaining good mental health and dealing with anxiety during the pandemic. They create a positive level of stress that can keep us focussed.

- ❖ **They create structure** – Alarm goes off, have a shower, brush our teeth, get dressed….

- ❖ **We know what to expect**.

- ❖ **It makes us feel safe**.

- ❖ **They give us a sense of accomplishment** – they typically have a beginning and an end, planning our day around being able to prioritise them and getting them done.

- ❖ **They let us know how we are doing** – Even small routines like showering, brushing our teeth, and dressing are important parts of our day. Since the pandemic, many of us have taken a more liberal approach to those daily routines, lectures online & no screen on = working from PJ's in bed. Although this change is subtle, it can have a big impact, making you feel sluggish or lazy.

- ❖ **It's an indication to others how we are doing** – previously if you didn't show to Uni, or go out or attend your club, people would worry. There are less opportunities for people to check in on one another.

- ❖ **People who have an active daytime routine (as oppose to night-time one) have healthier sleep cycles** = better mental health.

- ❖ **It moderates impulsiveness**.

- ❖ I**t is beneficial for creativity** - Its regularity requires zero thought, so your mind is free for more important things. The key here is to find what works for you.

- ❖ **You can make time for what matters to you** - Once it is routine, there is no wriggling out of the meditation, exercise, getting washed, cleaning your sheets – that you KNOW benefits you just because you are tired or not in the mood.

- ❖ **The more you do something** – the better you get at it. Daily practice is where the magic happens.

Take 5 minutes to identify your current routine, or what you are doing day to day. Pick out key points that would like to/need to transfer to a new routing.

Current routine	Essential parts of your routine

How to Create Basic Routine:

Don't over complicate it to begin with and make sure it works with your lifestyle. Remember even the simplest daily routine can have significant mental health benefits.

Take it day by day to start:
- ❋ What lectures do I have?
- ❋ When will I eat?
- ❋ When will I do my 30 minutes exercise
- ❋ When will I do my course work?
- ❋ When will I relax?
-
Then you can move week to week:
- ❋ When do I call home?
- ❋ When do I clean the bathroom / kitchen?
- ❋ When do I shop?
  - o Etc….

Some suggestions:
1. Wake up the same time every day
2. Shower as if you were going out
3. Dress for the day (even in casual and comfortable attire)
4. Eat meals at regular times
5. Keep to a daily schedule of exercise
6. Limit your use of electronic devices or TV time
7. Go to bed at the same time each night

8. Create zones for different activities.
    a. Use your desk space for study & online lectures.
    b. Book the study areas out for revision / assignments.
    c. Take your exercise outside.
9. Try adding some deep breathing exercised or meditation into your day.

Mastered your basic routine? Now try looking at how you could make a few small adjustments.

Personal level:
How do you nurture yourself throughout the day – physically / emotionally / mentally?
➢ Plan in that tea / coffee whilst reading / Netflix.
➢ Make a healthy breakfast to start the day.
➢ Carve out 30 minutes to exercise.

Relationship level:
How do you connect with others?
➢ Make time to ask someone how they are doing.
➢ Reach out to family and friends via social media, call text.
➢ Plan a walk with a friend* create the opportunity to buddy up with someone on a walk outside.

Career level:
How are you creating routine with your studies / next step?
➢ Can you read more into the industry you are interested in?
➢ Offer volunteer work?
➢ Work on your CV?
➢ Subscribe to a newsletter connected with something you're interested in?
➢ Work on your LinkedIn profile?

Routine Planner

CODE have created a routine planner to help get you started. This will help you to establish your new routine and achieve what you want to achieve each day.

CODE have plenty of ways to help you keep healthy each week…

Yoga

Online

Every Tuesday at 6pm

http://codestudents.co/Fitness

Meditation

Online

Every Saturday

http://codestudents.co/meditate

CODE Community Support Group
(limited to 15)

Every Wednesday

1pm – 3pm in the Communal Area

http://codestudents.co/support