

Calm life hacks

Simple, practical tips to bring a little calmness back into your life. By Sally Parkes



Over the past 18 months many world issues have been brought to light resulting in us all experiencing some unexpected shifts. And even though we are now slowly moving out of 'lockdown' we are still becoming used to a new way of thinking, living and working. For many of us, this has resulted in a decrease to our mind health, with keeping our heads above water on a mental level, so to speak, becoming an ongoing challenge.

The Office of National Statistics show that the number of adults experiencing some form of depression has doubled during the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst a survey based on data from 3,527 adults found that the proportion of people reporting moderate to severe depressive symptoms increased from 9.7% between July 2019 and March 2020 to 19.2% in June 2020.

The positive side of these recent changes, however, is that more people are making their health a priority by putting their wellbeing first. This way, when stress is experienced, our reaction to it can be healthier.

And the good news is there are many simple ways in which we can do this, from

yoga to meditation, to clean eating and positive self-talk and enjoying nature more, to name a few. When using any of these tools, however, it can also be helpful to recognise what underpins and links all of them so that we can gain a better understanding of why what works for us, does so. And in this case, it is the nervous system, or to be more exact, learning to gain a certain degree of control over our own nervous system, that helps us

live a more harmonious existence.

Our nervous system is a complex network of nerves that relays messages to which the body responds accordingly. For example, if we view something that we perceive as dangerous or distressing, our nervous system may view this as an actual threat on our safety and respond by releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, so we can mobilise our energy systems in



order to leave the situation quickly. This is the well documented 'fight or flight' response. Likewise, if we see or experience something we perceive as comforting and safe, we are more likely to release feel good hormones such as serotonin and oxytocin and may even feel sleepy. This is known as the 'rest and digest' response. Neither response is better than the other, but for health we require a balance between the two, and currently for many of us, the former seems to me more common than the latter. The result of such an imbalance has led to increased stress levels which of course are known to affect rates of anxiety and depression.

External wellbeing

So how do we manage these common changes to our mental health on a day-to-day basis? Firstly, try being mindful about what you are taking in via your senses, and being aware of the sorting office that is your nervous system, as it has to sort through everything that you absorb, which in turn uses up your precious energy resources. For example, if you are struggling with feelings of depression but are watching the news three times a day even though you know that you never feel better afterwards, why not cut it down to once a day? Is the music you are listening to uplifting or do you notice feelings of frustration or maybe even anger arise when listening? If so, maybe switch to something more chilled out. Do you eat a lot of stimulating and/or processed and heavy foods? This can literally weigh you down so how about eating a little lighter for a week with organic ingredients and noting any differences that you feel? Are you spending too much time on social media and getting caught up in discussions

with people who's name you don't even know, and if so, why? If you need social media for work, be disciplined by setting a timer, going in, getting your work done, and getting out asap. Collectively, I call this kind of monitoring of one's environment 'management of our external wellbeing'.

Internal wellbeing

Ensure that you also work from the inside of you too and there are again many tools that you can employ to do this. They include observation of the breath and altering it accordingly if it has become shallow or erratic. Carving out non-negotiable time for physical movement and even if this is just 10 minutes before starting work, that's okay as regularity is the main objective. Getting your thoughts down on paper and into a journal can be very helpful for those with busy and overloaded minds in particular. It also allows you to read your words back and reflect at a later date, which is often helpful to note how far you have come in your journey of feeling better. And lastly, be kind to yourself. Our inner dialogue can be harsh so why not ask yourself: would I talk to my best friend like this? If the answer is no, why not try reframing your words so they are more gentle and encouraging, so you can befriend your inner voice. After all, you deserve kindness and compassion, just like everyone else. 🌸

'The world will be hard enough on you without you beating yourself up' - Tim Ferris

Sally Parkes Bsc is an author, teacher for @movementformodernlife and runs 200hr, prenatal, postnatal and fertility yoga teacher training. Follow her @sallyparkesyoga



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📧 sallyparkesyoga.com
 📧 info@sallyparkesyoga.com
 ☎ +44 7983 508 018
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