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Psychosomatic Awareness and Mind Body Regulation Exercises

A patient workbook for anxiety chronic pain stress and physical symptoms

Purpose

These exercises help you notice and regulate the connection among stress, emotions, thoughts, pain, muscle tension, fatigue, sleep, and other physical sensations. Physical symptoms are real. A psychosomatic or mind body approach does not mean that symptoms are imagined. It means that the nervous system, emotions, medical conditions, and physical sensations can influence one another.

Name: _____

Date started: _____ Clinician: _____

How to use this workbook

- Choose one exercise at a time. Most exercises take 2 to 10 minutes.
- Practice when symptoms are mild as well as when they intensify.
- Track what changes without expecting symptoms to disappear completely.
- Use screen-reader, voice-dictation, audio recording, or another accessible format as needed.
- Stop any exercise that increases pain, dizziness, panic, breathing difficulty, or distress.

Medical safety: Do not assume that every physical symptom is caused by anxiety. Seek urgent medical attention for new or severe chest pain, difficulty breathing, fainting, new weakness or numbness, sudden confusion, severe headache, rapidly worsening symptoms, or any other emergency concern.

Understanding the stress symptom cycle

Stress can activate the body's threat system. Breathing may become shallow, muscles tighten, sleep becomes less restorative, and attention narrows toward discomfort. With fibromyalgia or chronic pain, this activation may amplify pain and fatigue. The goal is not to argue with the body. The goal is to reduce unnecessary threat activation while still responding appropriately to medical symptoms.

Trigger	Unexpected travel, conflict, uncertainty, pain flare, poor sleep, or family concerns
Thought	Something is wrong, I cannot manage this, or I must solve this now
Body response	Muscle tension, pain, fatigue, racing heart, stomach discomfort, or shallow breathing
Behavior	Avoidance, repeated checking, reassurance seeking, overexertion, or medication-focused coping
Result	More vigilance, increased distress, disrupted sleep, and stronger physical symptoms

Exercise 1 Notice name and normalize

Use this brief check-in when physical symptoms or anxiety begin to rise.

1. Pause and place your body in a supported position.
2. Name the physical sensation without interpreting it: I notice pressure, aching, tightness, heat, trembling, heaviness, or fatigue.
3. Name the emotion: I feel worried, helpless, frustrated, sad, angry, or overwhelmed.
4. Name the trigger: This became stronger after or while I was thinking about _____.
5. Normalize the response: My body is reacting to stress. The sensation is real, and I can respond without immediately assuming the worst.

Anxiety before 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Physical discomfort before 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What I noticed:

Anxiety after 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Physical discomfort after 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Exercise 2 Longer exhale breathing

A longer exhale can help reduce physiologic arousal. Do not force deep breaths. Gentle, comfortable breathing is enough.

6. Settle into a supported position and loosen anything restrictive.
7. Inhale gently through the nose for a count of 4.
8. Exhale slowly for a count of 6.
9. Repeat for 6 to 10 cycles. If lightheaded, return to normal breathing.
10. Notice whether the jaw, shoulders, hands, or abdomen soften.

Optional phrase: I do not have to solve everything in this moment. I can take the next safe step.

Exercise 3 Gentle tension release

This modified exercise avoids strong muscle contraction and is appropriate when pain or fibromyalgia makes traditional progressive muscle relaxation uncomfortable.

- Hands: notice tension, then allow the fingers to uncurl.
- Jaw: let the teeth separate and rest the tongue gently.
- Shoulders: allow them to drop away from the ears.
- Abdomen: soften without forcing the breath.
- Legs and feet: notice contact with the chair, bed, or floor and release only as comfortable.

Move slowly. Skip any area that is painful, injured, or medically restricted.

Exercise 4 Accessible grounding

This grounding practice uses sound, touch, orientation, and body position rather than vision.

11. Name 5 sounds you can hear, from nearest to farthest.
12. Notice 4 points of physical contact, such as feet on the floor, back against the chair, clothing on the skin, or hands resting together.
13. Identify 3 objects by touch and describe their temperature, texture, shape, or weight.
14. Name 2 scents or tastes, if present.
15. State 1 orienting fact: I am in _____. Today is _____. My next safe step is _____.

Exercise 5 Actionable concern or rumination

Rumination often feels like problem-solving, but it repeatedly circles the same concern without producing a useful next step.

Actionable concern	Rumination
A specific step is available.	The same question repeats without resolution.
The step is within my control.	The focus is another person’s choices or an unknowable outcome.
Action leads to completion or review.	Checking or reassurance provides only brief relief.

Practice

The concern on my mind is:

Is there a safe and reasonable action I can take today? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, the smallest useful action is:

If no, I will return to this concern at: _____

Until then, I will redirect myself toward:

Exercise 6 Circle of control

Within my control	Outside my control

Exercise 7 Pain stress and activity pacing

The goal of pacing is steadier functioning. It is not complete inactivity, and it is not pushing through until symptoms become overwhelming.

- 16. Choose one necessary or meaningful activity.
- 17. Estimate how long you can do it before symptoms rise sharply.
- 18. Plan to pause before reaching that point.
- 19. Use a brief regulation strategy during the pause.
- 20. Resume, modify, or stop based on functioning rather than guilt.

Activity	Pain before	Anxiety before	Planned pause	Result afterward

Exercise 8 Travel nervous system plan

Complete this before travel so decisions do not have to be made while distressed or fatigued.

The part of travel that feels most difficult is:

What will make the environment more predictable:

The mobility or accessibility support I will use:

The person I can contact for practical support:

The coping skill I will try first:

My medication plan exactly as prescribed is:

Exercise 9 Evening nervous system reset

Use this routine to reduce anxiety-related arousal before sleep. Keep the order consistent so the routine becomes familiar.

- [] Review tomorrow’s essential tasks, then stop planning.
- [] Dictate unresolved worries into a note for later review.
- [] Reduce stimulating news, conflict, or problem-solving before bed.
- [] Complete 6 to 10 longer-exhale breaths.
- [] Use the gentle tension-release exercise.
- [] Orient to the room and clear the nighttime walking path.
- [] Take medication only as prescribed and avoid combining sedatives.
- [] Remind yourself that rest has value even if sleep is imperfect.

Exercise 10 Symptom response record

Date	Trigger	Body symptom	Skill used	Before 0 to 10	After 0 to 10

What I am learning

The symptoms most affected by stress are:

The strategies that help most are:

The symptoms that require medical follow-up are:

The thoughts or situations that most often intensify symptoms are:

The earliest body signal that tells me I need to pause is:

One skill I want to practice more consistently is:

One adjustment that could make this skill more accessible or comfortable is:

Personal regulation plan

Use this page with your clinician to create a simple plan that can be followed during anxiety, pain flares, travel, or sleep disruption.

My early warning signs

My common triggers

Skills that usually help

People or supports I can contact

When I should contact my clinician

When I should seek urgent medical care

Clinician review

Reviewed with patient on: _____

Patient response and observations:

Plan for continued practice:

Clinician signature: _____ **Date:** _____

*This workbook supports education and skill practice and does not replace individualized medical or mental health evaluation.
Use exercises within your physical abilities and follow the treatment plan established with your healthcare professionals.*