

Mindful Movement handout

Key concepts in the Breathworks approach to Mindful Movement

- The experience of bodies in pain/stress/fatigue
- Not exercise or body therapy, but moving meditation
- Quality of awareness in movement more important than range of movement
- Primary, direct, felt experience (rather than secondary experience)
- Movement following the natural breath
- Hard and soft edges
- Noticing habits / patterns / resistance – working gently with those
- Practising being not doing
- MM are a formal practice that feeds into mindfulness in everyday life
- Boom and bust – link with self-care and pacing
- Listening to own body and taking care of self – compassion

Introduction

Mindful Movement is a form of moving meditation, like a moving body scan. Breathworks has included Mindful Movements in our courses from the outset because chronic pain, illness and stress all tend to lead to tightening of muscles and chronic tension in the body, which can in turn lead to further pain. Some people with severe chronic pain experience loss of movement in parts of their body. The Breathworks Mindful Movements, being based on Vidyamala's own limitations and experience of severe chronic pain, have been specifically designed to accommodate and gently work with this. Over the years we have found that many people discover they can move more after a few sessions of our Mindful Movements. We've found that most people who do not have restricted movement, find the series of prescribed movements in the programme very beneficial. For people with serious pain conditions, learning to move something as simple as opening and closing the hands with the breath gives them confidence to move without increasing pain.

As practitioners and as teachers, it is much more important to get a sense of this experience of mindful movement as a form of moving meditation and to connect with one's own *direct, felt experience* during the movements, than to try and get through a long list of movements. This is not a form of exercise or body therapy (though it may of course be therapeutic!). Nor is it a competition with anyone else, or with our younger, more able-bodied self. This practice offers an opportunity to practise self-care and taking responsibility for only doing what is ok for our body in this moment. In this way we can explore moving between the 'soft edge' where we barely begin to register effort or movement and the 'hard edge' where pain or injury is possible. Aside from taking care of our body as we move, there is no right or wrong in moving meditation any more than in sitting meditation - it's all about the *quality of awareness* that we bring to sensations in the body

As living, breathing humans, we move all day. Bodies need to move, even bodies in pain. In our Breathworks courses, we want people *in* their body and connecting to their experience – it's very important for developing and deepening their mindfulness practice and awareness. And mindful movement practice is a wonderful way of practising being in the present moment, tuning into our experience.

There is also an important link to movement in daily life. Often we cut off from our body when we experience pain, or we become less mobile and start to fear movement. Mindful Movement helps reconnect with our body, and has real transformative potential even (or especially) when moving a painful body. It offers an opportunity to notice patterns of resistance and holding, and a concrete way of moving towards choice and release. In particular, Mindful Movement enables us to notice where we bring a sense of effort – thus linking to pacing – and can bring a new awareness to

functional, everyday movement. Moving mindfully can also work effectively as a transition into a meditative awareness at key points during our day, such as before a potentially stressful meeting or appointment.

The breath is integral to moving mindfully, so this is a key aspect of our Mindful Movement programme, helping to address the holding patterns of breathing that can come with pain or stress. Awareness of the breath and movement flowing together can lead to a deepened sense of flow and change in our experience, rather than a sense of being stuck with pain, stress or difficulty as if it were a solid, immovable thing. Body movement also has a significant impact on the emotions, often calming them, sometimes leading to a release of emotion – so as practitioners and teachers, we need to be aware of this possibility and see it as an opportunity for practice for ourselves and our participants.

Teaching Mindful Movement

It's really important to convey to your course participants the essentials of the Breathworks' approach to Mindful Movement as discussed above, so that they have an understanding of how the practice links to everything else in their mindfulness course.

When you begin teaching the movements themselves, begin with modelling **transitions**/getting up and down off the floor mindfully and safely (including with a chair for support) if you are doing lying movements. Remind your participants not to lead with the head, as this is likely to lead to strain and injury.

When considering how to approach the MfH lying down movements, bear in mind that most people in pain (not all) are better supported when lying on the floor or bed, etc. so it is easier to learn how to move without bothering about balancing. As people are encouraged to practise at home, using their bed is an option if unable to get up or down from the floor. People who are unable to lie on the floor, can be encouraged to visualise the movement then practise doing it at home. Alternatively, if there is a second teacher or supporter, they can work one-on-one with participants to modify the movements for a seated position.

When your participants are in place lying, standing or sitting in readiness for doing MM practice, take a few moments to guide them in **settling**, tuning into the points of contact between their body and the floor/mat/chair etc, letting go into gravity, becoming aware of their breath in the body.

Work through any of the Mindful Movements from the MfH or MfS course that feel appropriate to you:

- remind participants to do any movement slowly, gently, and if in doubt to stop or find their own way into movement – the key words are permission, tenderness, care and sensitivity
- mention any relevant teaching points as you guide your participants through the movements
- you could incorporate inquiry as you work through the movements – or leave it until the end of a sequence
- encourage participants to explore a range of movement as feels right for them
- include some poetry in the session as you feel appropriate

Which Movements to cover?

- If in doubt, cover fewer. It is more important to teach a quality of mindfulness through one movement than galloping through whole sequences – this will lead to more clarity and depth of engagement for your course participants.
- MfH course movements you could prioritise:
 - Side lying ones – shoulder rock and clock arm circle
 - Single/double leg cradle, lying on back
 - Opening hands, lying, standing or sitting
 - Sitting/standing MfH movements (except foot slides)

- MfH course movements you may wish to leave out or de-prioritise, as being more complex to teach/harder for participants to do:
 - Lunge
 - Supine leg stretch (though it can be good for exploring hard edge)
 - Moving cat
 - Figure of 8 (unless you are very confident with this one)
 - Foot slides
 - Flicking fingers (though it can be good for exploring hard edges and is a faster, more active movement)

We do not wish to be too prescriptive about MM – it is better for you as a Breathworks teacher to work with and teach movements that you like or can do and feel confident with.

In this way, we also want to encourage you to consider different options, possibilities and approaches to enable you to respond to the needs of the group you're working with.

By linking the formal MM to everyday and functional movement, you will also be able to encourage your course participants to practise the principles of MM in all kinds of everyday movements. You can then bring this into your Home Practice Review at subsequent course sessions.

Inclusion and accessibility

It is really important that, as Breathworks teachers, we consider how to work with people who can't do one or more movements eg. by visualising the movement or doing their own freestyle movement (which may be less excluding for some people). We can also encourage some people with health conditions to explore the possibility of approaching their physio exercises as MM. As teachers, we also need to be aware of additional/specific body and pain issues for people from certain groups eg. black and ethnic minority groups, women, people with disability, people with body dysmorphia.