

## Workshop 8: Using our minds as Self management tools

There is a strong link between our thoughts and feelings and our emotional and physical health. Perhaps you have heard the phrase “it’s mind over matter”. This doesn’t mean we need to ignore or forget our health condition, but it does mean that we can use the power of our minds to manage the impact our health condition has on our daily lives. For some people prayer and meditation can also be helpful ways to manage symptoms.

This sheet introduces the mind-body connection and the use of some helpful techniques to manage symptoms leading to improved self-management:

- Appreciate the significance of link between mind and body.
- Consider some ways in which we can use our minds to manage symptoms.
- Reflect on how some of these techniques could assist optimal self-management.
- Select a technique to try.

To demonstrate the power involved in this mind-body connection, we can do a short visualisation:

*Imagine a blackboard.... you are watching someone writing on it in chalk.... now imagine the sound as their finger nails scrape the board....*

### **What did you notice happened during this visualisation?**

Did you notice any physical reaction? Did you tense? Shudder? Was it pleasant?

As you can see unpleasant stimulus can have a very big effect on us, this is often the case when we have had severe pain in a particular situation.

We can also notice this power, it can work against us, when we start to experience pain or something which can cause distress. Our powerful minds begin to focus on this pain or distress. Niggling thoughts keep going back to whatever it is, rather like a ‘dog with a bone’.

The main thing to remember is whatever we focus on will get bigger or stronger. If we focus on a positive thought or sensation or a distraction it will get bigger, likewise if we are focusing on pain or anxiety it will feel like it’s getting bigger.

There are a couple of techniques which can help us in these situations; these are visualisation and distraction - both can take time and practice to get right.

### **Distraction:**

You might already be using distraction, by **doing** 'things' which keep you busy and take your mind off the pain or distress you are experiencing - things like doing a jigsaw, making a cake or planting some seeds.

### **Thinking:**

There is another type of distraction which involves **thinking**. This type of distraction deliberately focuses our thoughts on something other than a troubling symptom you are experiencing - things like naming garden flowers or capital cities, or by reciting your 'times tables'.

### **Visualisation:**

Visualisation is a little different. This technique uses mental images that we have already created or selected to help us to manage symptoms. Like distraction, this can be used in different ways.

We can create a still image in our mind's eye, perhaps a flower or beautiful view, and we can snap this into position whenever a painful thought or feeling arrives; or we can visualise ourselves successfully completing a task we have set ourselves. This is very helpful when working on goals we have set ourselves.

When using both distraction and visualisation we need to be conscious that we are using the power of our minds by focusing our attention away from the symptom, or the situation, which is troubling us.

People who try these techniques are often surprised by how well and quickly distraction and visualisation work and will find different ways and situations to use them.



**When would it be helpful to you to use the power of the mind in the everyday management of your health condition?**

**Tick those that apply**

- To help with relaxation
- To help with sleep
- To reduce pain
- To relieve breathlessness
- To reduce worry

**When have you found yourself dwelling on a symptom?  
What did you notice?**

**When might you find power of the mind useful?  
Which symptom(s) would you like to be able to help with?**

**Can you think of a thinking type distraction that you have used?**