JumpStart Special Edition: CheckUp From the Neck Up

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**In the moment: short-term wellness strategies**

We all face times when we feel stressed, anxious, or uneasy. Try some of these strategies to help anchor yourself in the present. Take yourself from “mind full” to “mindful” by finding a strategy that helps remove distractions and emotions. Here are a few examples:

**Grounding.** Grounding techniques help bring yourself back to the present by focusing on the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). Things you can do, include:

**Breathing exercises to increase your vagal tone**

* + 4-7-8 technique: breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven seconds, out for eight seconds.
  + Belly breathing: place your hand on your belly just below your ribs and push it out as you inhale deeply through your nose. Breathe out again through pursed lips, as if you were whistling.

**Try the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method to reduce anxiety**

* + Name five things you can see around you.
  + Name four physical items you can feel at this moment (i.e. the chair you are sitting on, the floor under your feet).
  + Name three sounds you can hear right now.
  + Name two things you can smell in the air right now.
  + Name one good thing about yourself.

**Trace the outline of an object with your eye**

* + Notice every detail, on every surface you can access.
  + Describe the object as you would to someone who is trying to reproduce the object and has never seen or heard of it.
  + Consider colours, shapes, textures, size.

**Exercise mindfulness.** Similar to some of the grounding techniques, mindfulness is a practice that can help with short and long-term stress reduction and improve your mental health. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, which is meditation-based, has been shown to help reduce symptoms of both anxiety and depression. Mindfulness meditation practices can improve attention, memory capacity and executive function. It’s all about having an increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment.

Meditation doesn’t have to be formal or overly complicated. In fact, some of the grounding exercises above are simple forms of meditation. Mindfulness meditation is focused on what you experience during meditation, such as your heartbeat or breathing. Some of the keys include a quiet setting, comfortable position, focused attention, relaxed breathing and an open mind.

There are many mobile apps that can walk you through short and simple exercises to improve wellness. A few of the most popular apps are Headspace, Journey, Calm and Insight Timer.

**Short physical activity.** If you prefer a more concrete approach, physical activity can act not only as a distraction, but also halt some of the hormonal pathways that are activated with stress. Stretching or yoga can be very relaxing and improve your range of motion. Even a 10-minute walk during a break can help.

**Asking for (and accepting) help.** Speak with a coworker you trust or phone a colleague when you need advice. If they can’t help you directly, they may be able to help you brainstorm solutions. Recognizing that expressing emotions isn’t unprofessional and acknowledging that your work affects you will help you move forward.

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***I Matter*** *is a platform to equip veterinarians with knowledge and strategies to help them better cope with and respond to the challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. For more wellness resources, visit i-matter.ca.*