



## **The Blood Pressure Balance Programme**

This information contains notes and quotes to back up the discussions that we have in our sessions. Please take the time to read the relevant session notes after each session. The home practice for each class is detailed at the end of each week's session notes.

You may find it useful and interesting to keep notes of your experiences as the course progresses. There are spaces in the information to do this. Any notes you make are entirely to facilitate your own learning process and there will be no need for them to be seen by anyone else. If you wish, you can use your notes to remind you of your experiences during the week, and any questions you have, which you may want to bring to the next session.

If there are any difficulties in connection with the course, please contact your teacher to discuss things.

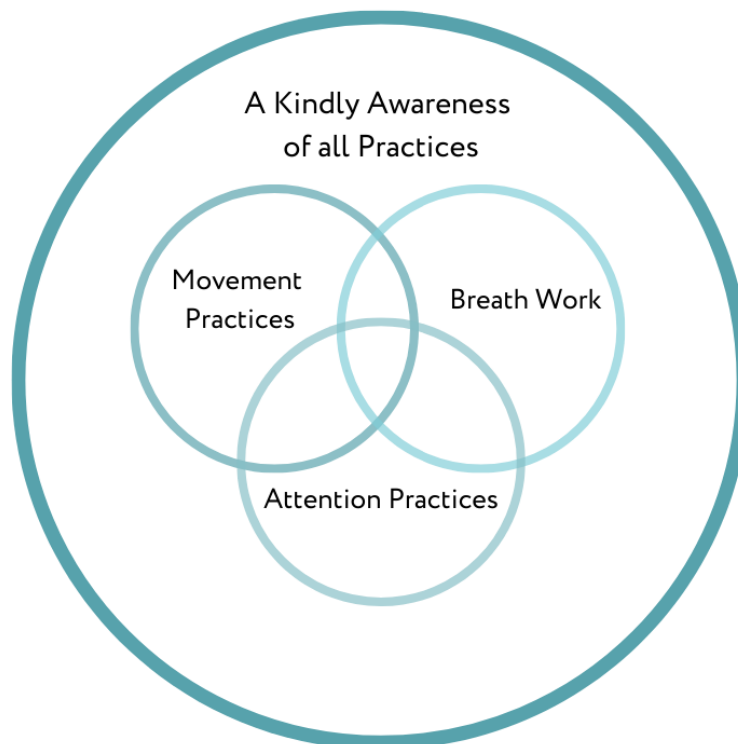
We hope that the course is a useful and enjoyable learning experience for you.

## Why The Blood Pressure Balance Programme?

The programme aims to teach new skills for how we can reduce our blood pressure in a more holistic way.

Holistic health is an approach to healthcare that considers the whole person – body, mind, spirit and emotions, in the pursuit of overall well-being and optimal health. It acknowledges that all aspects of a person's life are interconnected and can influence health outcomes.

Holistic health is often seen as a more comprehensive and integrative approach to healthcare, aiming to address not only physical ailments but also mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, with the goal of achieving balance and harmony in all aspects of life.



# The Autonomic Nervous System

The nervous system has a direct impact on our blood pressure, and helping to bring this system into balance supports us to regulate our blood pressure.

**The autonomic nervous system consists of two main branches:**

## Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)

### Stress Response

Revs you up, preparing you to fight, take flight or freeze.

Heart beats fast.

Breath is fast and shallow.

Pupils of eyes expand.

Gut becomes inactive (difficult to digest)

Blood rushes to your skeletal muscles and away from your brain making it hard to think clearly.

Hormones rush through your body, making you feel anxious.

Expend your energy.

## Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

### Relaxation Response

Calms you down, preparing you to rest, think and restore.

Heart beats in slow, rhythmic pattern

Breath is full and slow.

Pupils of the eyes shrink.

Gut is active (helps you digest and absorb the nutrients from your food)

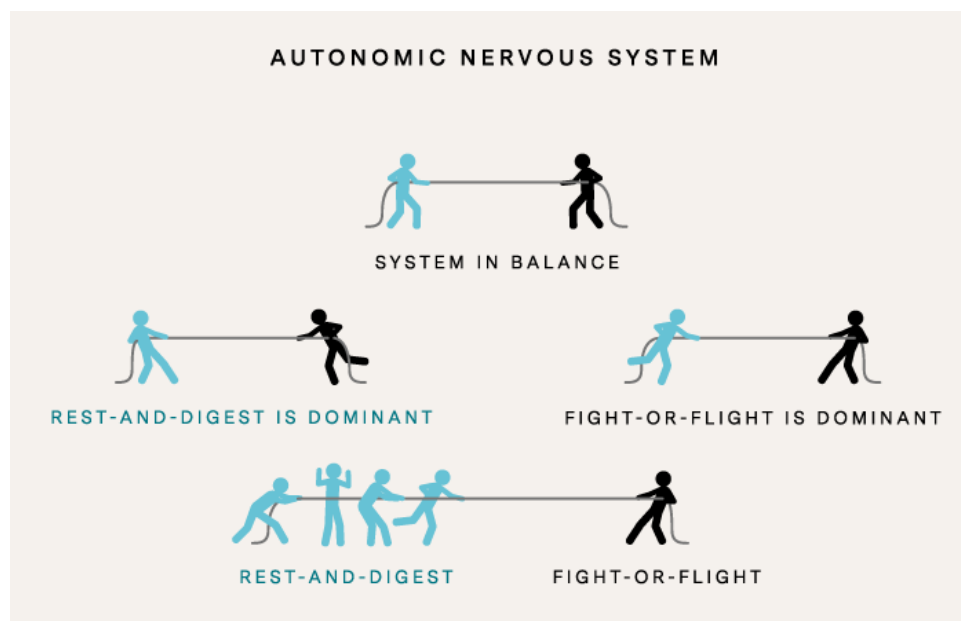
Increased blood flow to gut, lungs and brain.

Hormones rush in, lifting your mood and helping you relax.

Conserves your energy.

These two branches of the autonomic nervous system work together in a dynamic balance. For example, when faced with a real or perceived threat, the sympathetic nervous system activates to prepare the body for action, increasing heart rate and redirecting blood flow to the muscles. Once the threat has passed, the parasympathetic nervous system promote relaxation and restore equilibrium.

The autonomic nervous system plays a crucial role in maintaining internal stability, responding to environmental changes, and ensuring the body's ability to adapt to different situations. Dysfunction or imbalance in the autonomic nervous system can lead to various health problems, including cardiovascular disorders, gastrointestinal issues, respiratory problems, and disturbances in emotional regulation. Therefore, understanding and supporting the proper functioning of the autonomic nervous system are essential for overall health and well-being.



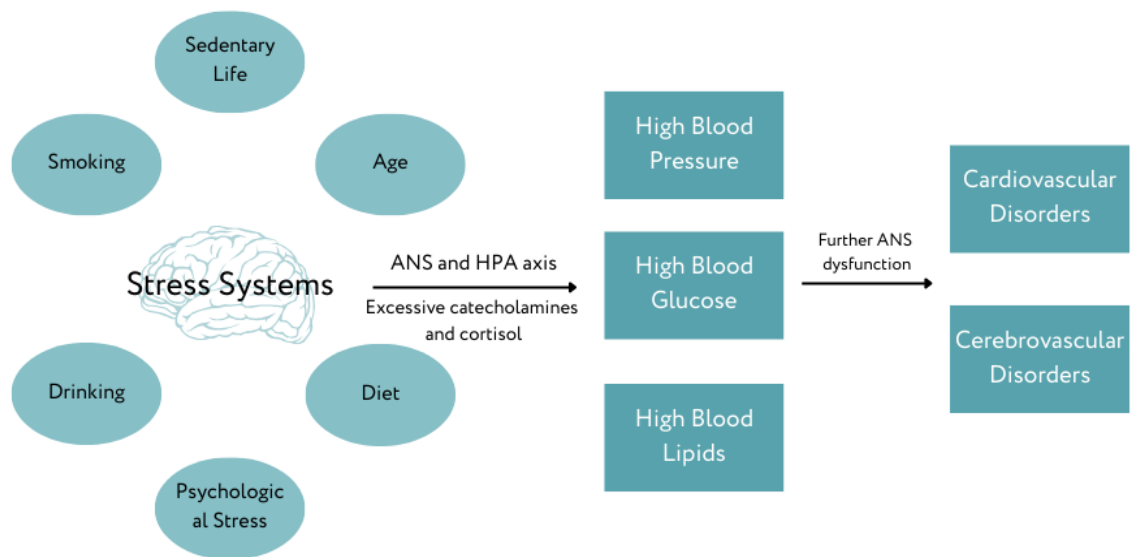
## Cardiovascular Disease and Mental Health

The relationship between blood pressure, cardiovascular disease (CVD) and mental health is complex and bidirectional, with each influencing the other in various ways.

**Psychological factors** such as chronic stress, depression, anxiety, and social isolation, have been linked to an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Chronic stress and depression can lead to dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and **sympathetic nervous system**, resulting in increased

inflammation, elevated blood pressure, and changes in heart rate variability, which are all risk factors for CVD.



**You are just one  
breath away from  
connecting to the  
wisdom of your body.**

## **The Peace of Wild Things**

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For the time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

*By: Wendell Berry*

## Home Practice is an important part of the course!

The patterns of the body and breath that we will be working to change have often been around for a long time. These patterns are also frequently habitual and automatic. We can only expect to succeed in making changes in these long-established ways of body and breath if we put time and effort into learning new ways.

It can be challenging to find the time to do the home practice that is part of this course. It really is worth it though. A useful attitude to adopt is – ‘I’ll give this my best shot, with an open mind. At the end of the course I’ll decide what the learning has been for me and what I can take away with me’. In order for you to make a decision about whether this approach could be a useful part of your life you need to engage with it fully during these 6 weeks.

A part of each session will be used to reflect on your experiences of the home practice during the week. We will discuss too any difficulties that you may be experiencing with the practice – either in getting to do it or things that arise for you during the practice itself. Much of the learning of the course can be drawn from these experiences.

### Patience and persistence

Because we will be working to change established patterns of body and breath, much of the approach will involve investing considerable time and effort, the effects of which may only become apparent later. In many ways, this is much like gardening – we have to prepare the ground, plant the seed, and ensure that they are adequately watered and nourished – and then wait patiently for results.

The encouragement is therefore to approach this course with the same spirit of patience and persistence – committing yourself to put the time and effort into what will

be asked of you, while accepting, with patience, that the fruits of your efforts may not show straight away.

### The practicalities of home practice

The practices in this programme should, ideally, be carried out once daily. It is up to you when you do them, but it is generally best to slot them in at the beginning or end of each day.

Most people find early morning is best, shortly after getting up. Other good times are immediately before lunch, or before the evening meal. This may mean that you have to rise a little earlier in the morning and, if you should do so, go to bed a little earlier too, so that the practice isn't carried out at the expense of sleep.

Regularity is important too. It cuts down procrastination and allows you to schedule your day more efficiently.

If you are attending the group with someone that you live with, it will be helpful for you to discuss how you would like to practice, whether in the same room at the same time, at separate times, or perhaps at the same time in a different room. This may bring up thoughts and feelings for you in asking for someone to sit with you, or perhaps your own space to practice. We invite you to hold those thoughts and feelings kindly as you navigate this part of your practice.

## Guidelines for doing the Body Scan

One way we can develop our awareness of our breath and body is by engaging in the Body Scan practice.

Regardless of what happens (falling asleep, losing concentration, being distracted by thoughts, emotions or other physical sensations, don't feel anything), just do it! These are your experiences in the moment. All you have to do is be aware of them, even if your mind is wandering a great deal. If you are distracted by wandering thoughts, emotions or other physical sensations, simply notice them as passing events, and then gently return to the instructions on the audio file.

- Notice if you have ideas about 'success', 'failure', 'doing it really well', or 'trying to purify the body'. This is not a competition. It is not a skill that you are striving to perfect. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. See if it's possible to cultivate an attitude of openness and curiosity about whatever you happen to experience during the body scan.
- Try approaching your experience in each moment with the attitude: 'Ok, that's just the way things are right now'. If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, this may only distract you from experiencing anything else.
- Notice if you have expectations about what the body scan will do for you; instead you might find that you're planting a seed. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. When you leave it to grow, this seed will eventually expand to become a life lived with more mindfulness, and the freedom to choose skilful behaviours.
- So with the body scan, you only have to give it the most helpful conditions: time that you set aside to devote to yourself and the body scan, privacy and quiet, and regular and frequent practice. The more you try to control the effects of the body scan, the less effective it will be.
- The most important guideline is: **just do it!**

# Home Practice and Practice Log

## Home Practice for this week: Body Scan

Here is the link to our website where you can find the audio practices and handouts each week.

<https://the-mindful-life.com/>

Try to complete the Body Scan once daily.

Don't expect to feel anything in particular from this practice.

In fact, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience.

Record on this form each time you do the Body Scan. In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions of that particular body scan: what came up, how it felt, what you noticed in terms of physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. It's important to write the comments immediately after the practice because it will be hard to reconstruct later.

**Date**

**Home Practice Comments (The Body Scan)**

