# Alberta Virtual Pain Program (AVPP)

Group Program
Participant Guide





# My At-Home Practices: Participant Guide

**Note:** These My At-Home Practices will be introduced throughout the 6-week group-based program. You are welcome to read through in advance or print off a copy if it will be helpful to your learning. To get the most out of the exercises, we encourage you to hold off on completing any of these practices until after each session.



# My At-Home Practice My Pain Journey

Activity: Fill your Flower

#### How do I practice this activity:

You can either print this page or write down your answers on a separate piece of paper

On the **petals**, write four things or people that make you smile or feel joy (example: it could be a recent movie/tv show, song, movement, something you read).

On the **roots**, write two people who you feel supported by.

On the **leaves**, write two small things you most hope to change in your pain journey

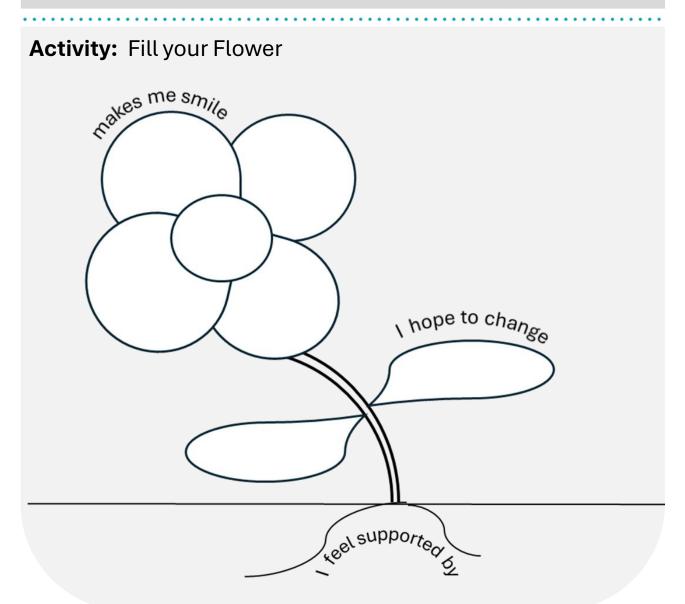


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# My At-Home Practice My Pain Journey





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### **My At-Home Practice**What Matters to Me?

**Activity: Values and Actions** 

#### What is it?

This is an activity that focuses on identifying our current values and what actions we can take to live by our values.

#### How do I practice this activity?

- Take a look at the example chart of different values and possible actions (page 2)
- Fill out as little or as much as you want of your own values and actions (page 3)

**Tip**: If you feel stuck thinking of values or actions, change your environment where you do the activity. Choose a quiet place or somewhere you feel the most connected to nature.



# **My At-Home Practice**What Matters to Me?

#### **Examples Chart**

Life Areas	Values Examples	Action Examples
Relationships (family, friends, parenting, social life)	Be part of a group/community.  Have close and healthy relationships with others.	Get together with a group of people with shared interests.  Write my pain level on the kitchen whiteboard so my loved ones know what I can can/can't do for them that day.
Work/Education/ Volunteering	Contribute to my community.	Volunteer at an animal shelter.
Recreation/Leisure	Experience exciting, new, and fun things.  Seek adventures.  Feel healthy.	Try a new recipe.  Learn to play piano or sing.  Engage in gentle water and/or sitting exercises
Personal Growth/Spirituality	Be accepting of myself.	Practice self-compassion and mindfulness activities.



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### My At-Home Practice What Matters to Me?

#### How would you fill out this chart based on what is important to you?

Life Areas	Values	Actions
Relationships (family, friends, parenting, social life)		
Work/Education/ Volunteering		
Recreation/Leisure		
Personal Growth/Spirituality		



### My At-Home Practice What Matters to Me?

**Activity: Photograph Joy** 



#### What is it?

This is an activity that involves taking a photo of something or someone that brings you joy.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Use your camera/phone to take a photo of an object, scenery, plant, artwork, person, or animal that creates the feeling of joy for you.

#### Questions to ask yourself

What was it about the photo that brought you joy? Are there values that bring you that same sense of joy?



# My At-Home Practice Why Do I Hurt?

Activity: What makes my pain better or worse?

#### What is it?

This is a self-reflection activity that encourages us to think about which factors might worsen or improve our pain experience.

Factors that make my pain worse	Factors that improve my pain
Example: Lack of sleep	Example: Ice/heat





# My At-Home Practice Moving My Way

**Activity:** Moving With Joy

#### What is it?

This is a movement activity that you find enjoyable.

When we perform movements that feel safe and comfortable to us, we can help to retrain our overprotective pain system.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Starting with just a few minutes, move your body in a way that feels good to you. You decide how you move. All movements, even little ones to start, are helpful.

#### There are so many ways to move. You could move:

- ✓ Pain-free areas or less painful spots
- ✓ To music or to the rhythm of your breath
- ✓ By walking indoors or outside
- $\checkmark$  By dancing, hula hooping, clapping, tapping, any speed you like
- ✓ Alone or with others
- ✓ Using a YouTube video.
- ✓ To your own routine

At times, when moving feels challenging you can close your eyes and visualize that you are moving with joy.

This is your groove!



## My At-Home Practice Nurturing Our Nervous System

#### **Grounding Activities: Choose One To Try Out This Week**

**Put your hands under water** – focus on the physical sensation of the water on your hands, fingertips, and palms. You can choose colder or warmer water if you wish.

**Hold an ice cube in your hands** – what does it feel like for the ice to melt in the palm of your hand?

**Listen to instrumental music** – choose an instrumental song and see if you can focus on identifying the different instruments (if your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the sounds). You can substitute this music with sounds of birds/nature.

Reflections: Did you notice any changes in your pain experience? Did the volume of your pain turn up, down, or did it stay the same?



# My At-Home Practice Nurturing Our Nervous System

Catch-It	Check-It	Change-It
Notice if you have a thought related to your pain. What was the thought?	Was the thought helpful or unhelpful? What emotions came up for you?	What might be a more realistic/helpful/hopeful thought? (if you want to change the thought)
Example:  Wow, I woke up and felt I could get out of bed with ease	Helpful thought.  Emotions: content, optimistic, curious	If I don't want to change the thought, that's ok! Maybe I want to keep the thought as it is.
Example:  When I wake up in pain, it always ruins my day.	Unhelpful thought.  Emotions: frustrated, anxious, defeated	I have had days with pain but have also enjoyed spending time with good friends.



### My At-Home Practice Medications: One Piece of Our Pie

**Activity:** How do medications help me do activities that matter to me?

#### What is it?

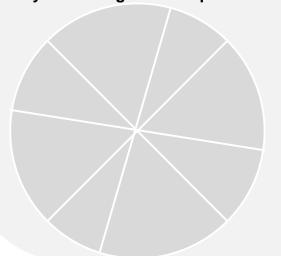
This is a self-reflection activity that encourages us to think about the role medications can play in our overall wellness.

Why do this? Our overall wellness can be thought of as a pie. The slices of our pie are the strategies we use to improve our overall wellness. These strategies could be sleep, movement, and social connection to name a few.

Medications are also one strategy for us to try to improve our overall wellness. Medications can even create space for us to perform other strategies that can improve our overall wellness.

How would you label your slices of the overall wellness pie diagram?

Add your strategies to the pie.



Examples of some strategies you already use or want to use:

Movement

Sleep

Nutrition

Connection with others

Relaxation & coping

activities

Medications

What are some others?

Some strategies may have a larger or smaller role in your overall wellness. The slices aren't always the same size.



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### My At-Home Practice Medications: One Piece of Our Pie

**List** how your current medications (including prescriptions, overthe-counter medications, injections, supplements, and other substances) can be helpful and unhelpful to you.

In the last month, how have my current medications been...

Helpful for me	Unhelpful for me

Tip: We encourage you to share this activity with your healthcare team.



Activity: An Engaged Patient is a Prepared Patient

#### What is it?

This is a communication worksheet that you can complete before going to an appointment.

Communication is a two-way street. By preparing for your appointment, you can express your concerns, needs, and goals more effectively.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Answering some of the questions on the next page can help you have a focused discussion with your health care provider.

**Option:** Watch the 10-minute video <u>7 Tips for Discussing Chronic Pain with Your Doctor</u> Created by the <u>US Pain Foundation</u>



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What questions or concerns do I want addressed during this appointment?		
Do I have any new symptoms? If yes, my symptoms are:		
- how long have I had them:		
- since they started, they are getting worse, staying the same, getting better:		
- activities that make it worse:		
- they are eased by:		
- I get these symptoms times per day, days per week, days per month, weeks per month, other		
- each time my symptoms last forminutes,hours,days, other		
- how is my sleep affected?		
- how has my usual routine changed recently? Examples: sleeping, eating, standing, walking, showering, increased stress, life events/family, work?		
- if I had similar symptoms in the past, when was it? What helped? How long did it last?		
What am I most hoping to get from this appointment?		



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Activity: Getting the most out of every appointment

#### What is it?

These are some example questions you can ask to help you get the most out of your medical appointments.

Communication is a two-way street. Don't be afraid to ask your health provider to repeat or clarify important information.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Read some of the questions out loud in front of the mirror or with a friend. By becoming familiar with asking questions during your health appointment you can ensure you are getting the information you need to manage your health.



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I need a minute to think about what you've just said.

Can you say that again, I didn't quite catch it?

How will I tell if the medication is working?

How long does it take to know if the treatment is working?

What is the best way for me to contact you if I have questions or concerns?

Can you write the diagnosis down for me?

Are there any websites you can recommend so I can learn more?

**Pro Tip:** At your appointment **repeat** back what you understood before you leave.



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### My At-Home Practice Mission Nutrition

Activity: Flare Day Meal Plan

#### Why do this?

Every day, week, or month can be a different experience. During those times when your symptoms are more intense having access to some quick meals can help ensure you are eating nutritious foods.

#### How do I practice this activity?

 List one meal you can pull together easily for days when you have a flare up.

#### **Example:**

- Peanut butter on whole grain bread with sliced banana and yogurt on the side.
- 2. Yogurt Parfait: Plain yogurt oatmeal or bran cereal with nuts/seeds, topped with thawed frozen fruit.

<b>ip:</b> Post your Flare Day Meal Plan on the mage or inside your cupboard.	



**Option:** Watch the <u>Nutrition Video</u> created by <u>Pain Canada</u> Resource: Free online self-management tool for people living with chronic pain <u>LivePlanBe+</u>



### My At-Home Practice Slipping Into Better Sleep

Activity: Planning for better sleep

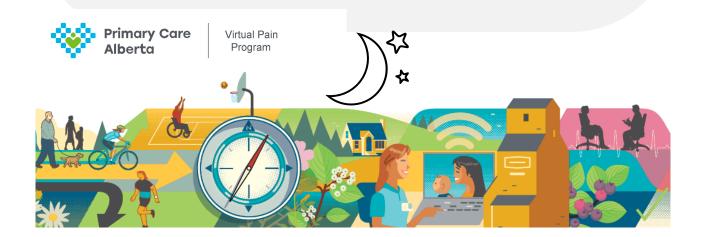
#### What is it?

Pain can affect our sleep and how we sleep can affect our pain. Exploring different strategies that help to improve one, can also help to improve the other.

Activity: Create a list of strategies to ease your pain at night

**Examples**: mindful moment, timing of medications, etc.

**Activity:** Create a list of things you can do if you can't fall asleep **Examples:** relaxation strategy, meditation activity, listening to an audiobook, reassure yourself that at least you are resting, get out of bed and do a quiet activity until drowsy



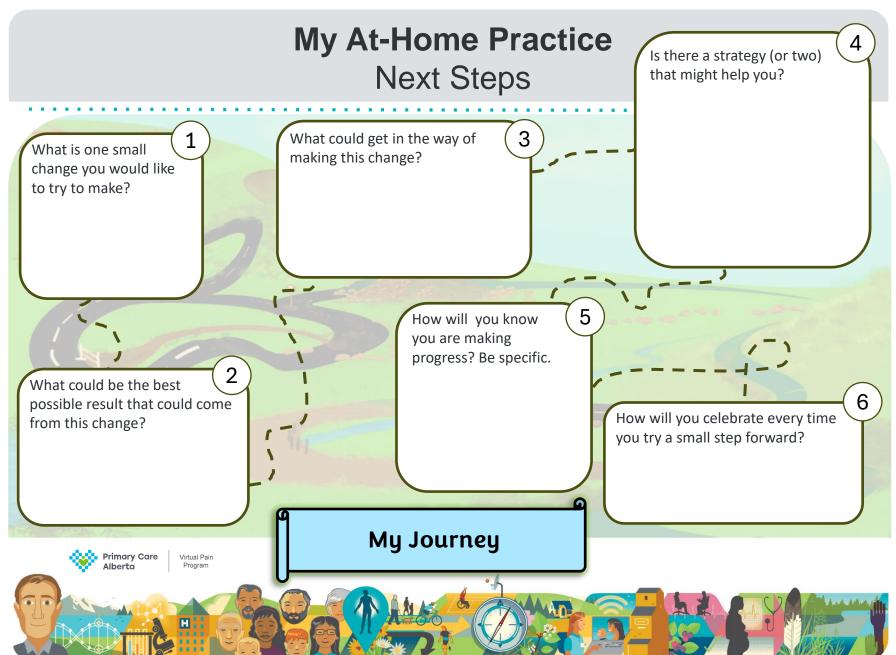
# My At-Home Practice Slipping Into Better Sleep

#### **Sleep Tips**

- ✓ Cool temperature of room
- √ Keep room dark
- ✓ Use a pillow between legs or a rolled towel under neck
- ✓ Engage in relaxation activities
- ✓ Use ear plugs, noise cancelling devices, sleep masks
- ✓ Listen to music or audiobooks
- ✓ Communicate sleep needs with loved ones
- ✓ Try not to get stuck on not being able to sleep
- ✓ It's ok to be resting when you are not asleep
- ✓ If you did not sleep well, consider rearranging your schedule for the next day (try not to cancel plans)
- ✓ Even 'good sleepers' don't get 8 hours of good quality sleep.







# My At-Home Practice Resource Page

Write down any mindfulness practices/other strategies, celebration choices, supports, and resources that you found helpful or may find helpful as part of your pain journey.

Mindfulness/Other Strategies: e.g. Breathing practice, movement, mindful eating, relaxation activity ...

Mindfulness/Other Strategies:

Mindfulness/Other Strategies:

#### **Celebration Choices:**

e.g. Sharing in peer support group/friends/family, favorite cup of tea ...

#### **Supports:**

e.g. Peer support group, therapist, family, faith group, pet ...

#### **Resources:**

e.g. AHS Chronic Pain Primary Health Care Resource Centre website; Power Over Pain portal ...



# My Flare-Up Action Plan: Participant Guide

This is a weekly My-At Home Practice

Each week many different strategies are discussed to help you manage your pain.

At the end of each session, your group facilitators will encourage you to review your **Flare-Up Action Plan**.

We hope you can take some time each week to consider which strategies would like to try, explore, or continue to use to help you manage your pain during flare-ups.



Activity: My Flare-Up Action Plan

#### Why do this?

Sometimes pain flare-ups happen. Creating your own Flare-Up Action Plan can help you be ready for higher pain days. Taking time to prepare a flare-up plan when your pain levels are lower allows you to quickly implement strategies that work for you on those challenging days. Think of it like a First Aid Kit – it's there when you need it.





#### Over time, your aims and plans can and will change.

Even the best laid out plans may not turn out as we hoped. Think of them as evolving based on what strategies you have tried. After using a strategy for a reasonable length of time, you will learn what works for you and what doesn't. Start small & add to your plan to make it the most effective for you.

Remember your flare-up will pass and being accepting will help. Keep this plan in a place where it will be easy to see and use.

#### What could be EARLY warning signs of a pain flare-up?

Physical Sensations	Examples: muscle tension, achiness, headache, nausea, fatigue, dizziness
Thoughts	Examples: "why does this always happen to me!" "I will never get better"
Emotions	Examples: sad, irritable, depressed, anxious
Actions & Behaviours	Examples: isolation, substance use, doing less activity or movement, withdrawing, arguing with loved ones
Triggers	Examples: over-doing it, caffeine, changes in weather, increased stress or worry, poor sleep



### **My At-Home Practice**

### Flare-Up Action Plan

#### **My Flare-Up Action Plan**

What are my EARLY warning signs of a flare-up?
Physical Sensations:
Thoughts:
Emotions:
Actions & Behaviors:
Triggers:



	Session 1	
My Pain Journey	Acceptance can help with h	ealing.
Strategies I can use	☐ Mindful breathing	Recall "this flare will pass,
	☐ Access supports	being kind to myself can help"
	☐ List my strengths	☐ Attend Peer Support
	☐ Do activities I enjoy	Sessions
	☐ Remind: "accepting does not mean I approve"	☐ Others:
	☐ Notice new ways I have grown	





Session 2	
Identifying values can help uwe want to live our life.	ıs make decisions about how
☐ Identify what is most important to me (my values)	☐ Others:
☐ Mindful "54321" using my senses	
☐ Do something gentle that matches my values	
□ Look at photos of things or people that bring me joy	
	Identifying values can help to we want to live our life.  Identify what is most important to me (my values)  Mindful "54321" using my senses  Do something gentle that matches my values  Look at photos of things or

# Why Do I Hurt does not always equal harm. Strategies I Reassure myself that my pain alarm can be overprotective Focus my attention to things that are not associated with pain Pain is real. Hurt does not always equal harm. These activities turn my pain volume down: pain volume down: Others:





	Session 3	
Moving My Way	Sore, but safe. A little step forward is still a step	o forward.
Strategies I can use	<ul> <li>□ Reassure myself "I am sore, but safe"</li> <li>□ Move or stretch to music</li> <li>□ Pace by taking breaks</li> <li>□ Acknowledge "I am moving as I am able"</li> </ul>	☐ Move parts that hurt less☐ Others:
Nurturing Our Nervous System	Improving self-awareness of our actions can help us decrease structure of our pain.	
Strategies I can use	<ul> <li>Practice Catch it, Check it, Change it</li> <li>Choose a calming relaxation activity</li> </ul>	<ul><li>Grounding activities that I can use are:</li><li>Others:</li></ul>



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#### Session 4 **Meds Are** Medications can provide a window of opportunity for One Piece of change. the Pie ☐ Refer to my "Overall Strategies I ☐ What is helpful or unhelpful Wellness Pie" for for me: can use strategies Other ways to ease my pain are: Preparing for your appointments can help you better Pain Speak: communicate your concerns, needs, and goals with your **Empowering Our Voice** health care provider, Strategies I ☐ List my needs □ Plan self-care can use ☐ Use the symptom Bring a loved one with me template for support ☐ Try hand tracing breathing □ Ask when I don't understand ☐ Practice the scripts □ Others: **Primary Care** Virtual Pain



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	Session 5	
Slipping Into Better Sleep	We are preparing for sleep the	he moment we wake up.
Strategies I can use  Mission	□ Exposure to morning sunlight □ Move throughout the day □ Pace my activity in the day □ Limit napping □ Dim lights and turn off electronics  What and how we eat can have	☐ Follow my sleep routine ☐ Reassure myself "it's okay if I don't fall asleep" ☐ Use heat or cold to manage my pain ☐ Others:  ave a big impact on our pain.
Nutrition		
Strategies I can use	<ul><li>□ Create a flare-up meal plan</li><li>□ Stock frozen &amp; canned veggies</li><li>□ Hydrate</li></ul>	<ul> <li>□ Prep my meals</li> <li>□ Eat mindfully using all my senses</li> <li>□ Ask for help with meals</li> <li>□ Others:</li> </ul>
Primary C	Ore Virtual Pain Program	





	Session 6	
Looking Ahead	The end of a journey is simp	ly the start of another.
Strategies I can use	☐ Post my flare-up plan so I can see it	☐ Plan for getting around barriers which may come up
	☐ Take tiny steps towards changes I want	☐ Be kind to myself when there are setbacks
	☐ Celebrate each step	☐ Others:
	☐ Remember key strategies in my backpack	
The strategies in My Flare Up Action Plan that I will try FIRST are:		Reflections
		After trying a strategy for a reasonable time, consider:
		1. What went well:
4		2. What do I want to change next time:
Primary Co Alberta	<b>cre</b> Virtual Pain Program	3. Other reflections:
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#### **Additional Flare-Up Plan Resources:**

FLARE UP PLANNING (tims.nhs.uk)

Plan for Flare Ups | Action On Pain (action-on-pain.co.uk)

Pain Flares, Flare-up factors, Warning signs, and Management | Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute (TAPMI) (tapmipain.ca)

My Flare.pdf (tapmipain.ca)

Managing Chronic Pain Flare-ups: What You Can Do | Oregon Pain Guidance

Pain Management Network Flare-Up-Plan.pdf





### Mindful Moments: Participant Guide

These mindful moments will be introduced throughout the 6-week group-based program. You are welcome to read through in advance or print off a copy.

We encourage you to practice these mindful moments on a daily basis and add the helpful ones to your backpack.



### Mindful Moment Mindful Breathing

**Activity: Mindful Breathing** 

What is it? This is a simple mindful breathing activity that can help bring you to the present moment.

#### How do I practice this activity:

- Find a comfortable position for yourself. This might include sitting, lying down, or standing
- You can close your eyes or choose an object in your room to softly gaze at
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth if that feels comfortable to you
- As you breathe in, bring awareness to sensations of the air as it enters your body. You might notice that the air feels cool or warm, or moist or dry
- When you exhale, notice the sensation of the air moving from your belly, and through your chest, neck, and out through your nose or mouth
- You can choose to do a few cycles of breathing in and out mindfully

**Tips:** Notice if your thoughts wander during this activity. If it does, know that this is common. Gently bring yourself back to the breathing activity without judgment.

Another option is to play nature sounds in the background. If you experience bothersome feelings in your body during the mindful breathing, you can shift your attention to the sounds of nature.





### **Mindful Moment**

5-4-3-2-1

**Activity:** 5-4-3-2-1

What is it? We can sometimes get caught up in our thoughts about the past or the future. This is a grounding activity to help bring you back to the present moment. Some people also find this activity helpful to decrease intense emotions.

#### How do I practice this activity:

Find a comfortable spot sitting or lying down. Keep your eyes open for this activity



Think of 5 things that you see



Think of 4 things that you hear



Think of 3 things that you feel on your body (for example, the feeling of the chair touching your leg and the feeling of your feet planted on the floor)



Think of 2 things that you smell



Think of 1 thing that you taste (even if it's a neutral taste)





### Mindful Moment Moving with Joy

**Activity:** Moving With Joy

#### What is it?

This is a movement activity that you find enjoyable.

When we perform movements that feel safe and comfortable to us, we can help to retrain our overprotective pain system.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Starting with just a few minutes, move your body in a way that feels good to you. You decide how you move. All movements, even little ones to start, are helpful.

#### There are so many ways to move. You could move:

- ✓ Pain-free areas or less painful spots
- ✓ To music or to the rhythm of your breath
- ✓ By walking indoors or outside
- ✓ By dancing, hula hooping, clapping, tapping, any speed you like
- ✓ Alone or with others
- ✓ Using a YouTube video
- ✓ To your own routine

At times, when moving feels challenging, you can close your eyes and visualize that you are moving with joy. **This is your groove!** 





### Mindful Moment Finger Breath

**Activity:** Finger Breath

What is it? It can be difficult to communicate how we are feeling and what we are thinking when we experience intense emotions such as stress. This mindfulness activity can help ground us before having a difficult conversation or before going to a healthcare appointment.

#### How do I practice this activity?

Take one hand, and with the other finger coordinate your breath as you trace your thumb and fingers.

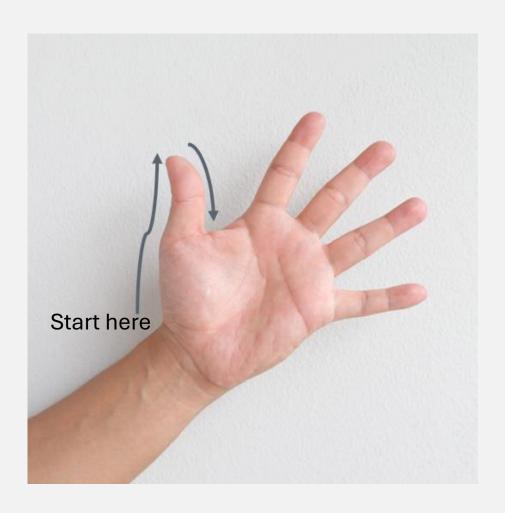
- 1. Let's start at the thumb: trace up the thumb as you breath in, and breath out as you trace down the thumb.
- 2. Go up the index finger and breath in, now breathe out as you slide down your finger.
- 3. Breath in as you come up the long-finger, and breath out as you go down the other side.
- 4. Now let's breath in and slide up the ring finger, and breath out as you go down.
- 5. At the pinky finger, go up breathing in, and breath out as you slide down it.

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### Mindful Moment Finger Breath



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### Mindful Moment Using our Senses

**Activity:** Mindful eating

What is it? This mindful moment is a great way to use our senses to bring our awareness to eating. Try not to rush through the activity.

**How do I practice this activity?** Choose a small snack (or beverage) that you know is gentle on your body. If you prefer, you could use ice chips. We encourage you to approach this practice with curiosity!

**Look** – Hold the food in your hand and be curious about what it looks like. Notice textures, colors, and shapes.

**Feel** – What does it feel like to hold the food in your hand? Notice the temperature, or any sharper or smooth parts.

**Smell** - Bring your attention to the smell of your food (or lack of smell). Sometimes people will experience memories when smelling a certain food.

**Taste** - Once you have the food in your mouth, take notice of any taste changes.

**Hear** - Is there crunching or other sounds that you hear as you chew? Swallow the food when you are ready.





### **Mindful Moments**Further Resources

#### **Websites**

Mindfulness: What is it? MyHealth.Alberta.ca

Mindfulness: Breathing Exercises MyHealth.Alberta.ca

https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices/#guidedpractices Guided self-compassion practices (free)

#### **Books**

Davis, M., Eshelman, E. R., and McKay, M. (2008). *The relaxation and stress reduction workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Gardner-Nix, J. (2009). *The mindfulness solution to pain. Step by step techniques for chronic pain management.* New York: New Harbinger Publications.

Siegel, R. (2010). *The mindfulness solution: Everyday practices for everyday problems.* New York: Guildford Press.

**Note:** People may find it helpful to reach out to a therapist or counsellor to support them through these practices. Please see our mental health resource list for more information.

