



The world can be a busy and stressful place. People can be rude, things don't go as we planned, and there is always one more thing coming our way before we are able to finally check out and have some "me" time. In prison, that can be much harder to get. Our state of mind is everything. It can be what prevents you from getting drawn into substance abuse, gambling, fights, and other activities that jeopardize your release and limit your privileges during incarceration. Keeping your mind and mission elevated is difficult. Even the strongest of us sometimes succumb to pressures and lose our cool. In this guide, we give you some solid planning as to how you can gain control over the only thing we truly have control of – ourselves. So, give this guide a try, and escape the pressures of the prison world by focusing on your own mental wellbeing.

STEP 1 Get your body in motion. Physical activity relieves stress and melts away anger, tension, and frustration. You may want to play ball, go to the gym, or run. Whatever options are available to you to get yourself in motion, do it, and do it frequently. Your greatest benefits will come from doing more than 30 minutes of physical activity consistently. However, don't just jump into this if you are not already active. Start small and build up to it. When you are in motion, stay focused on the activity itself. This is a time to enjoy, not dwell on things out of your control. There are no bars around your mind. Get lost in physical activity!

Additional Resource! You might find our [Maintaining Your Health Self-help guide](#) helpful in getting your body in motion. It has some great workouts that can be done in your cell or on the yard, as well as general health tips to help take steps toward improving your overall health.

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SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE TO*:

WriteAPrisoner.com
Maintaining Your Health Self-help
P.O. Box 10
Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

* Prison staff or pen-pals can also print this guide at
<http://www.writeaprisoner.com/self-help>

STEP 2 Avoid (as best you can) things and people that bring you down. Prisons have many mentally ill people, angry people, and worse. Avoid the problem people to the best of your ability. Do not hang around with people who act like they have nothing to lose. They usually don't and will contribute nothing positive to your mental wellbeing or future. Instead, focus on surrounding yourself with other positive people. Yes, they exist in prison. If you are reading this, you are likely one of them, or at least aspire to be. So, keep a watchful eye for others, and seek to make them part of your social circle.

If you do find yourself engaged in a confrontational situation with another inmate, do not allow yourself to become worked up. While it is natural to become defensive, it is intelligent to slow down, take a deep breath, and use logic to diffuse the situation. If logic will not solve the other person's issue, then use your own logic to move past the situation without allowing it to become physical.

STEP 3 Stay connected. Write, call, and visit with friends and family as often as possible. There is a proven correlation between your contact with the outside world and your improved state of mind. Keep the contact positive. If you have to talk about something unpleasant, do so without getting angry or upset. State your position and move forward onto more positive conversation. Always end all contact on a high note. This not only benefits you, it benefits the person on the other end.

STEP 4 Make time for what makes you happy. Do you like to read? Make time for it each day. Do you like playing chess with your friends? Invite them to play each day. By focusing on positive activities, your brain works to produce hormones that elevate your mood. If you are unable to make time for this each day, make time for it as often as you can. Some is always better than none!

STEP 5 Find someone to talk to, and talk to them! Whether it is a counselor, pen-pal, fellow inmate, find someone you can vent to, laugh with, and even cry with. Do not bottle your emotions up. As strong as you think you are, you do more harm than good by not venting. We understand the risks associated with appearing weak in prison. This is why we encourage you to find someone you can confide in. It is essential to your wellbeing.

STEP 6 Pets do wonders for us! Yes, we said pets. There are many programs coming to prisons to foster abandoned animals, train service dogs, etc. Sign up and live longer. People with pets live longer than those without. You would never think that after owning a cat and having to clean its litter every day, but the fact remains that having a furbearing dependent has a positive effect on our mental health. If this option is or becomes available at your institution, you will typically need an exemplary record to participate.

STEP 7 Stay focused on the present! Those living in the past are living with regret. Those living in the future are living with anxiety. Those living in the now are truly living. While we strongly encourage you to be extremely prepared for your future, we also strongly encourage you to do your best to focus on today and do your best to enjoy the passing of time. Working toward a positive future is still very much living in the moment.

STEP 8 Check to see if your institution has any group meetings and attend them. These meetings will give you the opportunity to work on many of the steps in this guide, and they will also help provide a positive social support system inside of prison. Voluntary groups are often preferred by inmates over mandated groups. This is because inmates come to the voluntary groups on their own accord. However, sign up for whatever group is available.

“Meditation is all about the pursuit of nothingness. It's like the ultimate rest. It's better than the best sleep you've ever had. It's a quieting of the mind. It sharpens everything.”

- Hugh Jackman

STEP 9 Meditate! Meditation builds a strong mind just as working out builds a strong body.

How to meditate:

- 1) Select a time of day to meditate. We recommend mornings if possible. Your mind tends to be more relaxed in the morning.
However, night meditating is better than no meditating. If that's all that available, do it.
- 2) Select a location to meditate. This is often a bigger challenge in prison. Try to find a safe and quiet place where you will be able to focus. The perfect location is available to almost no one. Find the best place for you.
- 3) Select a posture. Initially, you may want to use a wall to help keep your back straight. In time, you may want to abandon the wall support. Sit up as tall as you are able to make yourself. Rest your hands on your lap and allow the rest of your body to fully relax.

- 4) Breathe through your nose. Deep controlled relaxing breaths. While you do this, focus on the top of your skull. Allow tension to melt away from the top of your body to the bottom of your body. Neglect no part of your body, eventually making it all the way to your toes.

Benefits to meditation:

- Improved circulation
- Reduced respiratory rate
- Reduced anxiety
- Feelings of well-being
- Lowered heart rate
- Reduced perspiration
- Reduced stress
- Deeper sense of relaxation

Tips for successful reduction of anxiety and anger:

- * Avoid sugar and caffeine
- * Avoid alcohol
- * Never smoke. If you do, quit immediately.
- * Sleep. Easier said than done in prison, but rest is essential. We all miss a good night's rest here and there, but do your best to get the best sleep possible.
- * Eat healthy. Healthy food not only keeps our hearts and lungs healthy, it keeps our brains sharp and happy.

“Participating in an eight-week mindfulness meditation program appears to make measurable changes in brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress.”

Source:

<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/01/eight-weeks-to-a-better-brain/>

Success story or suggestion? We want to know what worked for you so we can share it with other inmates.

If you have a suggestion to make about this resource, please do so at:

Self-help Suggestion - P.O. Box 10 - Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

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