

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ann Bracken is a leading protagonist in the area of Fertility Counselling. Her innovative and research-led work integrates mindfulness, psychotherapy and mind/body practices to support couples and individuals as they journey through the challenges and joys of natural and assisted fertility. A highly qualified and experienced Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, Mindfulness Trainer and workshop facilitator, Ann has private counselling practices in Dublin, Ireland and Kensington, London. She also provides international consultations through her online counselling service www.fertilitycounsellingonline.com. A lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Glyndwr University, Ann is also a part-time Senior Fertility Counsellor at the world-renowned Lister Fertility Clinic, part of The Lister Hospital, Chelsea. As a certified Fertility Mind Body Programme trainer, Ann writes, delivers and facilitates fertility-specific workshops and training programmes for both clients and practitioners. Ann regularly writes feature articles and contributes to television and radio programmes on emotional and psychological health and well-being.

MIND BODY BABY

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How to Overcome Stress and
Enhance your Fertility with CBT,
Mindfulness and Good Nutrition

ANN BRACKEN



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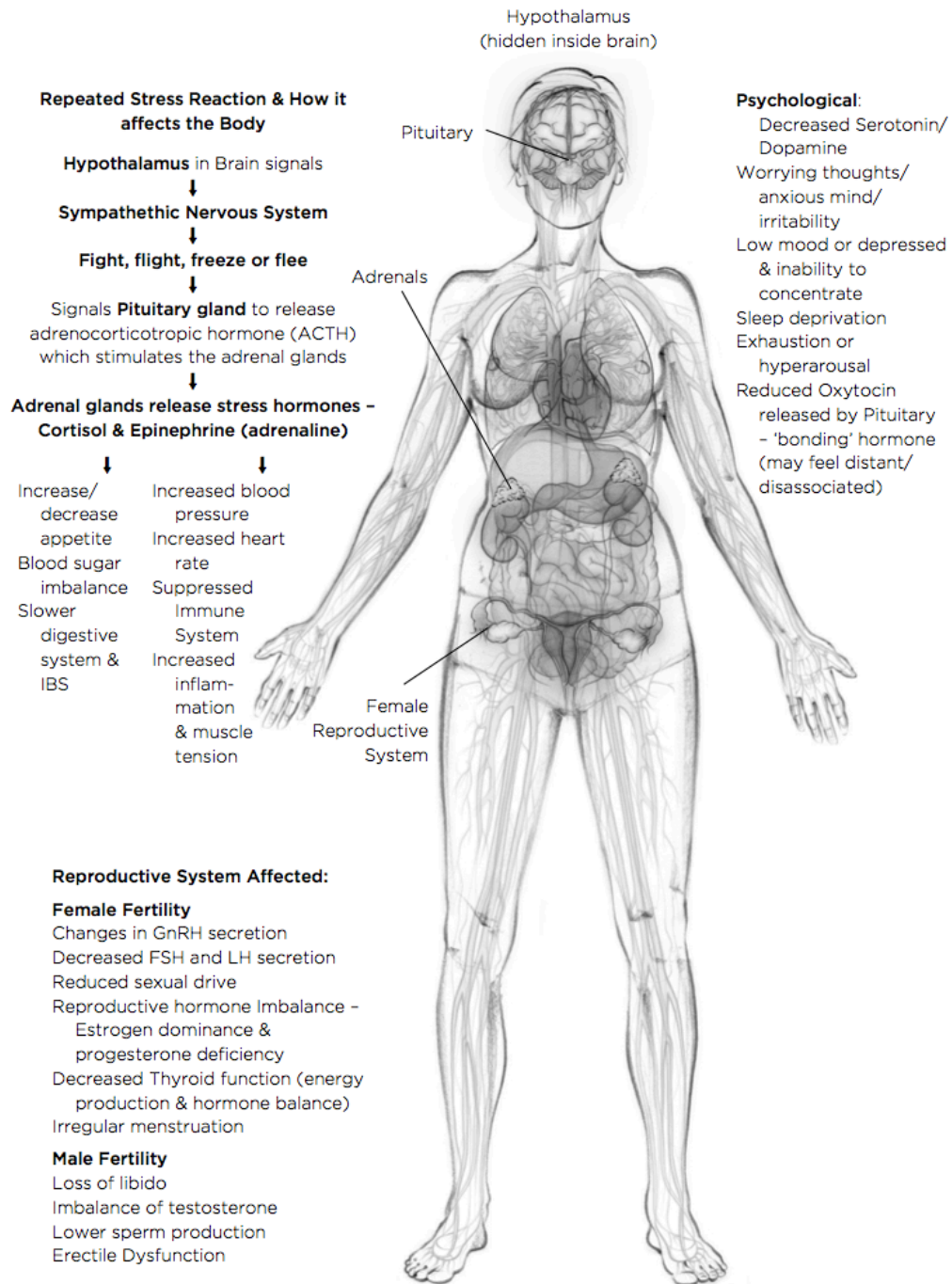
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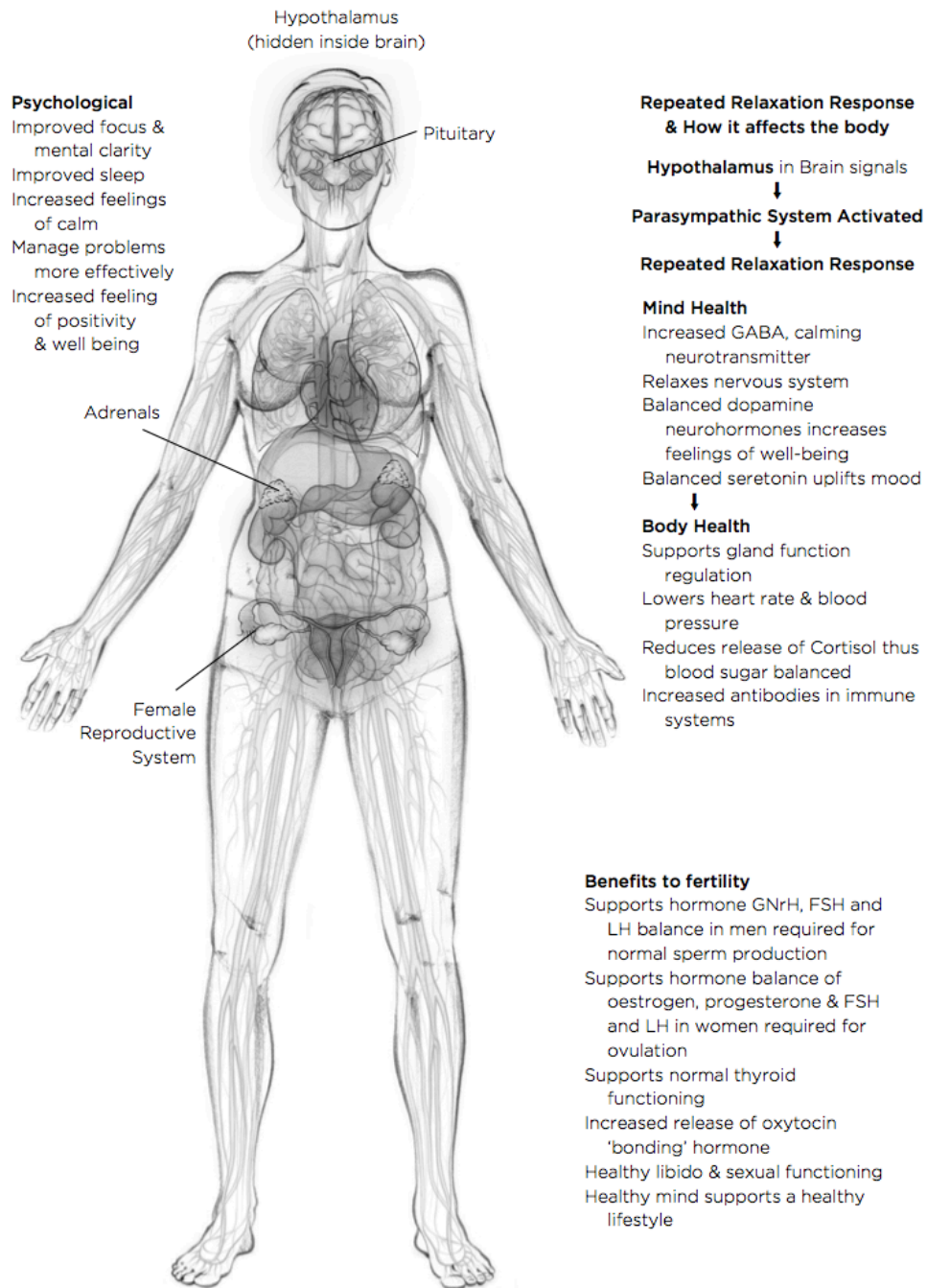
Chapter 2

Mindfulness Practice

1. Effects of Repeated Stress on the Body



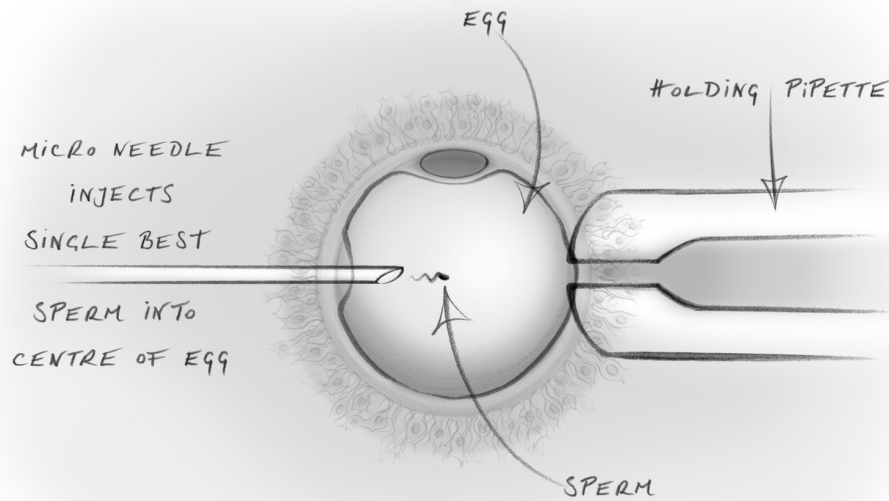
2. Effects of Repeated Relaxation Response on the Body



Chapter 3

Assisted Reproductive Treatment

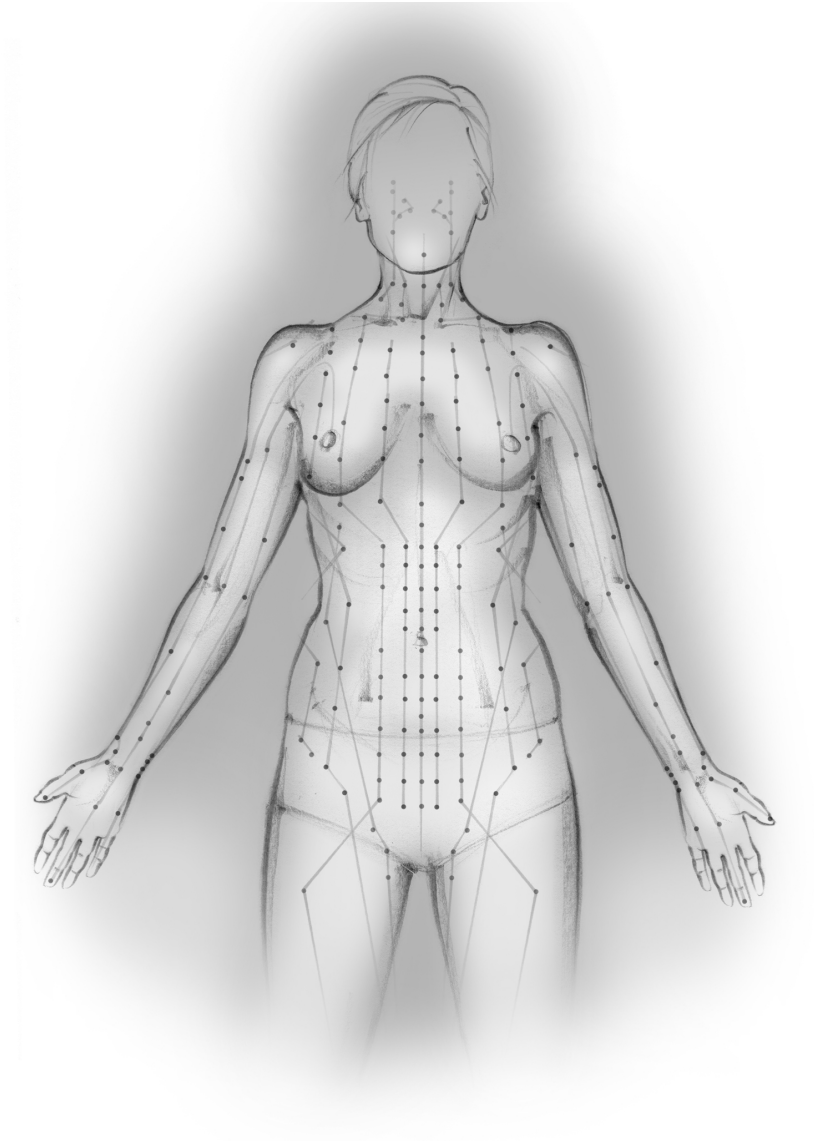
3. Image of ICSI – In Vitro Fertilization with Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection



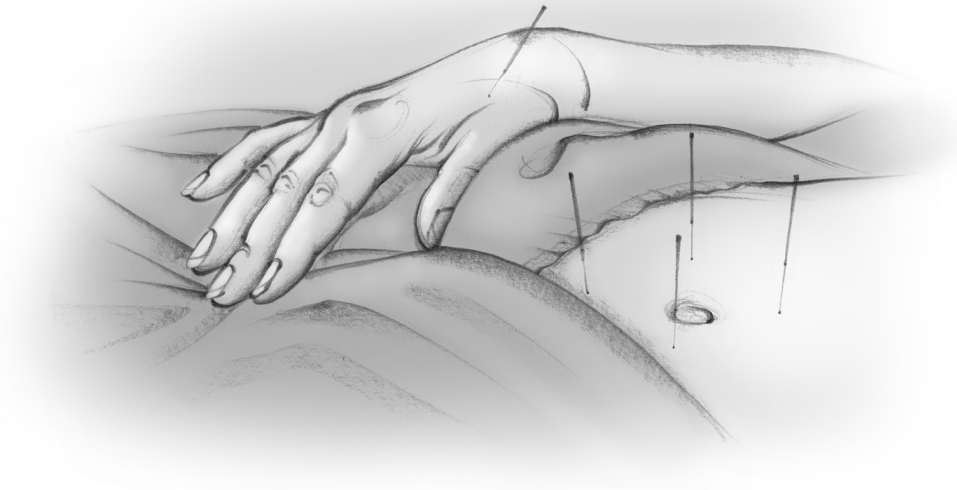
Chapter 4

Natural Health Therapies

4. The main acupuncture meridian channels



5. Acupuncturists work with specific protocols for fertility support and stress reduction

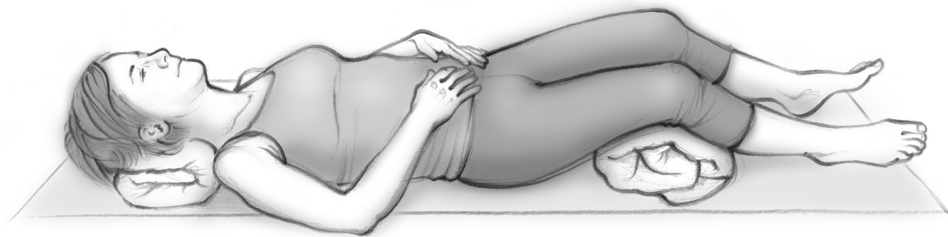


Chapter 6

Restorative Yoga and Mindful Movement

6. Relaxation pose with diaphragmatic breathing

Duration:	10 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)
Yoga props:	yoga mat 3 blankets Bolster eye pillow or hand towel folded three times



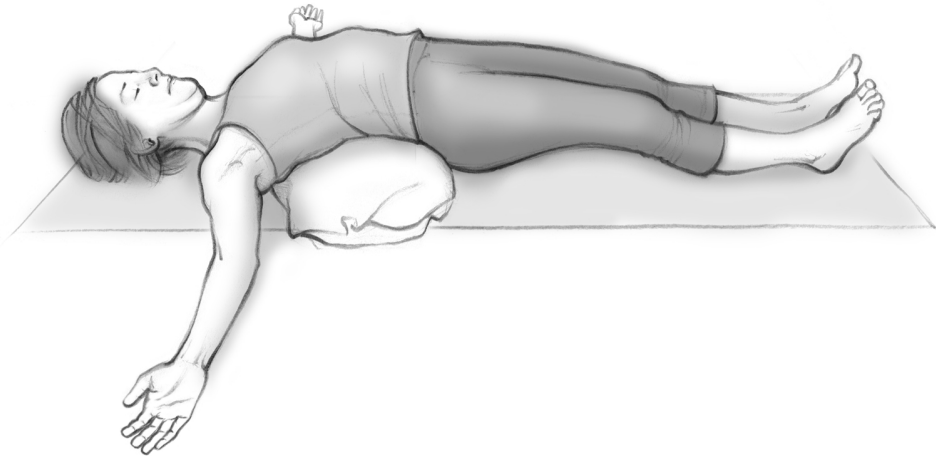
- ◆ Position a blanket (folded three times) on the mat to support your head.
- ◆ Before you lie flat on your back on your yoga mat, place the bolster underneath the back of your knees so they rest on it. You may also require another folded blanket, positioned lengthways from the top of your head to the end of the lumbar region of your spine, to provide further support to your lower spine. If you find that your neck is hyperextended and feeling uncomfortable, you could place a further blanket folded three times under your head with the folded end at your shoulder area and allow your shoulders to drop down into the mat.
- ◆ You may wish to keep your hands on your tummy area to notice the in- and out-breaths, or at a slight angle (approximately 35 degrees) from your side, resting with your palms facing up.
- ◆ You can place an eye pillow or folded hand towel over your eyes for light blackout if you feel comfortable doing so. This can promote deeper rest. However, for some this may feel too exposing and could increase feelings of vulnerability. Weighting is also used in restorative exercise to

help you feel more grounded; you can add an extra bolster or place two blankets folded three times across your abdomen in addition to your eye pillow.

- ◆ Begin your diaphragmatic breathing as you lie flat, facing upwards, and settle deeper into your reclined lying position. Notice where any areas of tension are in your body and direct your breath towards these areas. Notice also how your body and, in particular, your spine, connects with the mat underneath. You may notice that your mind is active with thoughts or beginning to experience some inner tranquillity. Just observe your sensations, feelings and thoughts without becoming overly engaged with them. Allow yourself to let go of mental activity. Notice thoughts as though they are clouds passing in the sky.
- ◆ After holding this pose for 10 minutes, you may wish to extend it to move into a supported bridge pose.

7. Supported Bridge Pose

Duration:	5 - 10 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)
Yoga props:	yoga mat 1 blanket yoga belt (or any cloth strap that can be tied)



- ◆ Place the bolster sideways on the yoga mat to provide support to your lower back and hip area while your buttocks and hips are lifted gently off the ground, as outlined below.
- ◆ Place a rolled blanket, sideways, directly beside the bolster which will further support your lower back. Ensure that the whole lower back and hip area are supported as your spine and hips are lifted off the mat on the in-breath and rested down on the support on the out-breath.
- ◆ Keep your legs a hip distance apart with your ankles resting flat on the mat. Recline into the supported bridge pose by curling your spine off the mat and on to your support bolster and blanket one vertebra at a time.
- ◆ Breathe naturally and place your arms out to the side with the palms facing upwards towards the roof. Your shoulders should rest into the mat. Ensure that your head and neck are also supported with the mat

beneath. Having the chest area raised slightly higher than your head deepens relaxation.

- ◆ After 10 minutes, turn your head sideways and roll slowly on to your side, sweeping your arm across your chest to place your hand flat on the side of the mat for extra support when sitting up.
- ◆ To loosen up your back and hip area, move into a supine twist pose.

8. Supine Twist Pose

Duration:	5 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)
Yoga props:	yoga mat (move your other props slightly out of reach)



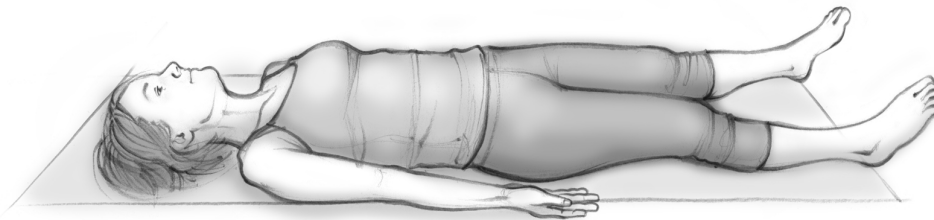
- ◆ Lie flat on your back on your yoga mat.
- ◆ Place your arms stretched out at shoulder height with your hands facing upwards.
- ◆ As you inhale, bring your legs together, bending your knees. Raise them up with your feet flat on the ground.
- ◆ As you exhale move your legs (still bent) to the right, resting them on the other side of the mat (if possible, without overstretching). Keep your head turned to the left. On the inhale, return your knees to centre with your feet on the ground and also moving your head to neutral position, with your eyes looking towards the ceiling. Now, repeat the exercise, moving your legs (bent) to the left and your head slowly turning to the right. Repeat these movements for 5 minutes breathing naturally. If you get lost in thought or sensations, take your attention back to mindfully being present to the rotation from right to neutral, and then to the left and back.
- ◆ When you have finished the exercise, stretch out on the mat: stretch your arms and hands above your head and feel the full-body stretch as you straighten your legs down, resting on the mat on the exhale. Before

moving on to the next pose, you can stay in the lying position and move into some deeper muscle relaxation with the progressive muscle relaxation exercise below.

9. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

Duration: 15-20 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)

Yoga props: yoga mat



- ◆ Lying flat on your yoga mat, stretch out as best you can, and place your arms parallel to your body with the hands facing up towards the ceiling. This exercise will involve focusing on each muscle group.
- ◆ Begin by taking a deep breath in and imagining the breath being drawn all the way down your body. As you exhale, have an intention to 'let go' of all the tension being carried.
- ◆ Take 3 deep inhales and exhales in this way.
- ◆ Now begin your muscle tensing by clenching your fists, holding them in a tight fist and counting back slowly 5-4-3-2-1 in your mind. Then release the hold and spread your fingers out, counting 1-2-3-4-5 slowly as you do so.
- ◆ Now bring your awareness to your biceps and forearms and tense the muscles as tightly as you can, again holding this tension for 5-1 and slowly release as fully as you can, holding again for 1-5. Remember to breathe as deeply as you can.
- ◆ Now bring your attention to your shoulders and draw your shoulder blades towards each other, holding them tense for 5-1 and relaxing them down and releasing fully for 1-5. Now become aware of the muscles either side of your spine and around your lower back. When you are muscle tensing this area, your lower back will naturally curve. Allow this to happen and hold the tension in your whole back area for 5-1 and release for 1-5
- ◆ Moving down the body, focus your attention on your buttocks area, squeezing your muscles and holding together for 5-1 and then releasing fully for 1-5.

- ◆ Now, become aware of your pelvis area and tense around here and the hips, really feeling the tension in your protective hip/pelvis area. Hold this, squeezing for 5-1 and release for 1-5.
- ◆ Gently move on to the top of your legs and particularly tense the back of your thighs. Then tense the muscles at the front of your thighs, down to your knees, holding then releasing. It can help to focus the tension from the knees up to the top of your leg rather than from the top down.
- ◆ Moving down the leg, squeeze the muscles at the back of your legs and around the front of the shin bone area. If sitting, this can be helped by raising your legs out in front of you and focusing on tensing the lower leg area. You raise your feet and legs slightly off the ground. By pulling the toes back towards you, the muscles in your calves will naturally tighten. Once again, hold this area tense for 5-1 and release for 1-5.
- ◆ Now moving on to your feet, curl your toes back towards your feet and feel the muscle tension in your feet. Hold the tension in your foot for 5-1 and release for 1-5.
- ◆ Now take your attention back to the front of your body, around your abdomen area. Tighten your stomach and pull the muscles gently towards your back, holding for 5-1, and gently releasing for 1-5.
- ◆ Move up along your body around your ribs, feeling the intercostal muscle group, and as you breathe in, hold the muscles tense, feeling your ribcage rise with the in-breath and release on the out-breath. As you focus on the ribs rising and falling with the in- and out-breaths, gently take your attention to the chest area.
- ◆ Hold the chest muscles tense for 5-1 and then relax fully into the mat for 1-5. Hold and release.
- ◆ Taking your attention to your shoulder area, tighten all the muscles and then draw your shoulders towards your ears, holding for 5-1 and then releasing, dropping your shoulders and being with that sensation for 1-5.
- ◆ Moving upwards focus your attention on to your neck and tense the entire neck area for 5-1. Then release for 1-5. If you have any physical problems with your neck area, avoid this and move directly on to your jaw area. If not, draw your head up and back, resting the top area of your head on the mat. You can extend the area by raising your chin so your neck is stretched fully and, once again, tense and release the entire neck area.
- ◆ Now take your attention to the muscles around your jaw. Open your mouth fully, tensing and stretching the connecting muscles in front of your ears on both sides of your head. Hold them tense for 5-1 and then release the hold fully for 1-5.
- ◆ Moving away from the jaw area, tighten the muscles around your eyes by squeezing them tightly shut for 5-1 and releasing the tension for 1-5.

- ◆ Also, tighten your cheeks and forehead. Raise your eyebrows, hold for 2 seconds and release. Repeat this 3 times.
- ◆ Now imagine tensing your entire head area and feel the weight of the tension being held, hold for 5-1 and then relax fully for 1-5.
- ◆ You can end the PMR exercise by taking 3 deep breaths in and releasing fully on the out-breath, while holding a sense of your body as a whole.

10. Gentle Inversion Pose

Duration:	10 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)
Yoga props:	yoga mat 1 blanket eye pillow (optional) yoga sandbag or bolster



- ◆ Place your mat with its width directly against the wall. Place your yoga props within easy reach.
- ◆ Sit on your mat sideways, positioning your left hip close to the wall while keeping your legs bent. Support your back by turning in a sweeping motion, moving your legs up the length of the wall while you are leaning back to lie flat on the length of your mat. This gets easier to do with practice!
- ◆ As your torso is flat against the mat, position your buttocks as close to the wall as you can without discomfort, while your legs are positioned straight up against the wall.
- ◆ If you feel an overstretch in your hamstrings, move your buttocks

slightly away from the wall.

- ◆ This slight inversion pose can be further elevated by placing a blanket folded 4 times directly under the buttocks to slightly raise the abdomen area causing it to lean slightly towards your heart.
- ◆ Finally, place a sandbag (or yoga bolster) on the soles of your flat feet, facing the roof. This optional weighting helps you to feel more grounded while also releasing the hips and lower back.
- ◆ To deepen the experience, you can reduce sensory stimulation by covering your eyes with an eye pillow or hand towel folded 3 times.
- ◆ Remain in this position for up to 10 minutes before easing yourself away from the wall by bending your legs and gently pushing upwards on the mat and away from the wall. Move to the side with the support of one arm flat on the ground and one arm bent across the body, hand flat on the mat as you push yourself up sideways to sitting position.
- ◆ You can then gently roll yourself into the nurturing child's pose.

11. Child's Pose

Duration:	5 – 10 minutes (set your mindful bell reminder)
Yoga props:	yoga mat Bolster, or pillow rolled in half 1 or 2 blankets towel folded 3 times



- ◆ Begin by placing the bolster in the centre of the mat lengthways and positioning yourself behind it, facing towards it.
- ◆ Kneel with your knees a little more than hip width apart and sit on your heels.
- ◆ Do a quick body scan and notice any areas of discomfort in your knees, legs or hips. Adjust your position to bring additional comfort to these areas.
- ◆ With your knees and legs held in their position, lean forward gently to rest on the bolster. Your head is positioned turned to the left or right, towards the top of the bolster. Your forearms are resting on the mat with your elbows directly beneath the shoulders.
- ◆ Your hips and your head are level with the bolster creating support under your torso. If your head is significantly lower than your hips, you may wish to fold a blanket in quarters and place it lengthways on the bolster to increase height. If you are very tall, you could add an extra bolster.

- ◆ You may wish to support your feet by placing a towel folded 3 times under your ankles. For additional support, you can also place a soft blanket under your knees.
- ◆ If you experience tightness in your hips, add a small pillow behind your knees, raising your upper legs slightly and providing more support.
- ◆ Rest your head to the side. If this is uncomfortable, you may wish to cross your forearms and place your forehead directly on them, facing down.
- ◆ During this pose you take deep breaths in and exhale fully and for longer to help deepen the relaxation.
- ◆ Use a mindfulness timed bell, or some other non-intrusive alarm, to indicate that you have completed the 5–10- minute child's pose. This is a gentle and nurturing pose to bring this restorative yoga sequence to a close.

Chapter 7

Fertility Thinking with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Fertility-Related Thought Record

Trigger situation relating to my fertility	Unhelpful thoughts or beliefs that were prompted . . . And what I wanted to do when I felt this way . . .	Describe the feelings you had because of this	Self-compassionate alternatives to thoughts or beliefs that were triggered	What can I do differently in this situation, if not now, in the future?	How do I feel now? Take a breath and notice where you connect to this feeling in your body
Where were you; with whom?	When this happened, what were you thinking?	Name the feeling and rate how strongly you feel it on a scale of 0-10 (10 being the strongest).	Is there another way to look at this?	Is there anything that I do which is not helpful to me in that situation?	Becoming aware of our feelings and where we experience them in our bodies allows us to be more present. It can help to create a pause between our stressors and how we respond to our stressors. Stop, breathe, notice and respond (not react).
What happened in detail?	What do you believe about yourself or others, for example, your partner, because this happened?	Where do you notice it in your body?	What would you say to a good friend if they were in this situation?	What could I do differently now or in the future?	Note where you carry uncomfortable feelings in your body: your head, your stomach or chest area?
When did this occur?	What do you believe that it means about your future or your past?		Is my belief a fact or an opinion? What is the evidence for and against this being true?		Name your feelings now: how strong are they on a scale of 0-10?
Why do you believe it happened?			Does my belief help me or keep me feeling negatively? If I was being kind to myself, what could I say differently to myself?		

Fertility-Related Thought Record – Example

Trigger situation relating to my fertility	Unhelpful thoughts or beliefs that were prompted . . . And what I wanted to do when I felt this way . . .	Describe the feelings you had because of this	Self-compassionate alternatives to thoughts or beliefs that were triggered	What can I do differently in this situation, if not now, in the future?	How do I feel now? Take a breath and notice where you connect to this feeling in your body
At a friend's baby shower.	<i>I shouldn't have to do this.</i>	<i>Angry (7).</i>	<i>I can choose to be here or not. She is my best friend so I'll stay for an hour and then arrange to leave. I can challenge myself but don't need to overwhelm myself.</i>	<i>Let Vicky know that I am really happy for her but also finding today challenging and let her know I will be leaving after lunch. She is always understanding about me going through this.</i>	<i>No longer feel nauseous in my tummy and the tightness in my chest has eased (4).</i>
	<i>They are all so insensitive talking about babies when I'm going through so much.</i>	<i>Anxious (8).</i>	<i>They don't know what I am going through so they won't know that it is hurtful, and it's normal to want to talk about babies here. I will breathe and go and join my friend and ask about her new job.</i>	<i>Ask John to collect me so I don't need to take public transport alone when I'm feeling like this. We can arrange to go and do something together. There is that film I wanted to see.</i>	<i>I feel sad but not tearful (4).</i>
	<i>It's hopeless, it's never going to work for us. They all have it so easy.</i>	<i>Tearful (8).</i>	<i>I am taking a snapshot of my friends' lives. I know they have joyful and challenging times as I do. It is difficult now, but it won't last forever.</i>	<i>Find some space in the garden and do some mindful breathing.</i>	<i>Feeling calmer (6).</i>
	<i>John should leave me, he'd be better off.</i>	<i>Feel sick in the stomach.</i>	<i>John loves me and I love him. We are going through this together and need to support each other.</i>	<i>Actually, three of our friends are busy getting things ready. I can get involved with that and it will distract me for a while.</i>	<i>Happy for Vicky (2).</i>
	<i>My friends have it so easy, they should stop complaining about their problems.</i>				

Chapter 8

Self-care and Effective Communication

Journal activity: Nurturing and Depleting Experiences

+	-
<p>I enjoy spending time with ... My friend Kate: she always makes me laugh, cooks great food and doesn't talk incessantly about her children.</p>	<p>I feel depleted when I spend time engaging with ... Aunt Maura, who always asks me when we're going to plan for a baby ... if only she knew! Janet, because she really doesn't get where I'm at right now.</p>
<p>I benefit from this hobby or pastime ... I really enjoyed playing the piano but haven't done much of that lately. Going to hear a band.</p>	<p>I find it a chore to ... Talk to everyone about how my treatment is going. Perhaps I need to manage this better for me.</p>
<p>I usually feel better after visiting the coast. ... a coffee shop with my book.</p>	<p>I don't enjoy going to the clinic - when I hear bad news.</p>
<p>What lifts my mood? The clinic - when I hear good news.</p>	<p>What lowers my mood? Work - when colleagues are busy making plans in the canteen for their family.</p>
<p>What lowers tension? Work - it's where I do really well and have some distraction from all this process.</p>	<p>What increases stress? Going on too many blogs. When I go on once a week, it's more helpful.</p>

Chapter 9

Caring for Your Relationship and Understanding Each Other

Using the table below for guidance, write down a list of caring activities that your partner does that you enjoy, enjoyed or would like to enjoy moving forward and pass them to each other. Write spontaneously for 10 minutes and then swap lists.

Caring behaviours in our relationship	What positive feelings do you have when you receive these caring 'gifts'?
Things you enjoy that your partner does for you . . .	
Things that you enjoyed in the past that your partner did for you . . .	
Things that you would like your partner to do more of . . .	

For example:

Caring behaviours in our relationship	What positive feelings do you have when you receive these caring 'gifts'?
Things you enjoy that your partner does for you . . . <i>Brings me coffee in the morning</i> <i>Drives me to the train station.</i>	<i>I feel looked after.</i> <i>I feel valued.</i>
Things that you enjoyed in the past that your partner did for you . . . <i>Loved it when you surprised me with planned nights out, for example buying theatre and concert tickets in our first years together.</i> <i>When you used to occasionally buy me flowers.</i>	<i>I loved those 'date' nights with elements of surprise. They felt exciting. I would love more 'date' nights, even though I know we don't have as much money at the moment. Perhaps we could go on 'budget' fun nights out together again.</i>
Things that you would like your partner to do more of . . . <i>Random surprises that show you care and have affection for us even in this difficult time.</i>	<i>It makes me feel cherished and important to you.</i>

12. Heart Opening Exercise

This heart opening exercise encourages closeness by giving and receiving touch grounded in breath, openness and compassion. It helps to bring you closer, builds trust and releases tension before you move into more stress-releasing body massage.



The giver is kneeling with legs apart behind the receiver on a yoga mat or blanket. The receiver is leaning slightly back on the giver. Legs are crossed and slightly apart, resting on the mat with the giver's legs resting on the outside of the receiver's legs.

Receiver: place your arms behind your head and relax your head by leaning it against your interlaced hands. Feel the stretch in your chest as you bring a

deep breath in through your nostrils. Giver: place your arms under your partner's armpits with your hands holding back his/her elbow area. Push your body gently against his/her torso as you do this. Slide your arms up further so that you are holding and stretching his/her forearms and opening their chest with your support. Hold this position for 8 breaths together.

Following this, the receiver moves gently into lying face down on the mat, turning their head sideways and supporting it with a pillow, if required. You can also place a folded blanket below the ankles if your partner requires lower-back support.

13. Back massage using effleurage movement



- ◆ Pour a teaspoonful of oil into the palm of your hands and rub your hands together to warm the oil.
- ◆ Begin at the lower end of the back with your whole hands moving in a clockwise movement, slowly moving up and around in the direction of the heart. Keep contact with the body and apply light pressure as you move up and encompass all the back muscles. Moving in these larger circular movements to cover the back in what is known as 'effleurage' movements. Ensure you do not place any pressure on the spine area throughout. Effleurage movements will evenly distribute the oil over the back and begin to relax the body.

14. Back massage using petrissage movement



- ◆ Now begin again at the bottom of the back using 'petrissage' techniques. Your thumbs can move in a clockwise circular movement as you cover the lower back and sides of the body and then gently move up to cover all the back muscles. It is as though kneading bread with more of the rolling work being concentrated in the thumbs and directing the fingertips in smaller circular movements. The palms of the hand are raised off the body as the thumbs and fingertips roll and press gently across the back and shoulders for deeper relaxation.
- ◆ Begin this at the lower back, moving out to the waist and then slightly higher and in towards his/her core again, alternating between light to medium pressure. Keep your wrists relaxed throughout the back massage. Take between 10 and 15 minutes to massage the back and shoulder areas.
- ◆ As you move across the shoulder area, from the centre outwards, let your partner know that you are coming towards the end.

About the Author

Ann Bracken (MA, GradDip, PGCert) is a Specialist Fertility Counsellor and Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist working in private practice in Dublin, Ireland and Kensington, London, with couples and individuals, and internationally with an online counselling service: www.fertilitycounsellingonline.com. She combines this with a part-time role as Senior Fertility Counsellor at the world-renowned Lister Fertility Clinic, which is part of The Lister Hospital, Chelsea. Ann is also a part-time lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Glyndwr University, Wales, lecturing in Family Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy (CBT). As a certified Fertility Mind-Body Programme trainer, Ann delivers weekend and evening workshops throughout Ireland and the UK.

Ann has previously worked as a Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist and Mindfulness Trainer in national health settings (UK and Ireland) and managed the fertility counselling service in SIMS IVF, part of the Virtus Health group with 15 fertility clinics worldwide.

Ann has also worked as a researcher on many health and features programmes during her time in BBC, RTÉ and TV3 Television. She is a published author and feature writer on emotional and psychological health and well-being.

Further Support

Ann works therapeutically with individuals and couples in private practice in Kensington (London) and Dublin city centre (Ireland).

Ann also runs online fertility counselling, a service to support individuals via Skype or with telephone or email counselling. Further details and bookings can be made at:

www.fertilitycounsellingonline.com

To book an appointment in Kensington, London:

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Email: appointments@annbrackentherapy.com

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Tel: (+353) 0 85 7414866

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The Fertility Mind–Body Programme

Ann Bracken is a certified mindfulness teacher and mind-body programme trainer. She facilitates weekend Fertility Mind–Body Programme workshops in London (UK) and in Dublin and Wicklow (Ireland).

The Fertility Mind–Body Programme provides a supportive environment for couples and individuals going through the fertility treatment process to reduce stress and enhance their fertility health and well-being.

This co-facilitated weekend programme includes mindfulness-based stress reduction, CBT, nutritional therapy, restorative yoga, relationship support and emotional coping strategies using positive psychology. The small groups offer a confidential and comfortable environment for mutual support.

For more details and to book your place on the Fertility Mind–Body Programme Weekend Workshop, please log on to:

www.fertilitycounsellingonline.com

Useful Resources

Adoption UK

Helpline: 0844 848 7900

www.adoptionuk.org

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)

1209 Montgomery Highway

Birmingham

Alabama 35216-2809

USA

Tel: (205) 978 5000

www.asrm.org

British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)

www.bica.net

The Daisy Network

PO Box 71432

London SW6 9HJ

www.daisynetwork.org.uk

Domar Center for Mind/Body Health

130 Second Avenue

Waltham, MA 02451

USA

Tel: (781) 434 6578

www.domarcenter.com

Donor Conception Network

154 Caledonian Road

London N1 9RD

Tel. 020 7278 2608

www.dcnetwork.org

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www.eshre.eu

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (HFEA)
Finsbury Tower
103–105 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8HF
Tel: 020 7291 8200
www.hfea.gov.uk

The Infertility Network (UK)
Charter House
43 St Leonards Road
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