

Microchillers: Quick, Easy, Portable Exercises On The Run

Microchillers are the onramp to your C-Spot: *Curiosity* versus judgment; *Calm* versus stress; *Clarity* versus confusion; *Compassion* versus cold-heartedness; *Confidence* versus self-doubt; *Connection* versus isolation; *Courage* versus fear; *Creativity* versus stagnation; *Comedy* versus drama; *Celebration* versus exasperation.

Sounds. Sit in a comfortable place with eyes open or shut for one minute. With curiosity, focus on all the different sounds around you, and see how many you can identify. You might notice the heating or air conditioning system, traffic off in the distance, a siren, voices from other places in the building, an airplane, ticking of a clock, or your own gurgling stomach. After one minute, instead of trying to remember the sounds, bring your attention inside and notice if you're not calmer and more clearheaded.

Five Senses. This simple yet effective grounding technique creates calm, giving you a sense of control when stress overcomes you:

Five: Name five things you *see* around you. Four: Name four things you can *touch*.

Three: Name three things you can *hear*. Two: Note two things you can *smell*.

One: Notice something you can *taste* inside your mouth.

Talk To Your Thoughts. At first this might sound odd, but well-established science shows that first-name self-talk—the way you speak to someone else, referring to yourself *by name* instead of as “I”—is a self-regulatory mechanism that creates psychological distance from stress, anger, or frustration. Once you engage this way in dialogue with your stressors, this shock absorber makes you feel calmer and more clear-minded. Research shows silently referring to ourselves by name instead as “I,” gives us psychological distance from the primitive parts of our brain. It allows us to talk to ourselves the way we might speak to someone else. The survive mind’s story isn’t the only story, and the thrive mind has a chance to shed a different light on the scenario. The language of separation allows you to process an internal event as if it happened to someone else. First-name self-talk or referring to yourself as “you,” shifts focus away from your primitive brain’s inherent egocentricism. Studies show this practice lowers stress, gives us self-control, cultivates wisdom over time, and puts the brakes on the negative voices that restrict possibilities.

Past Recall. When faced with a challenging situation, the human mind is hard-wired to automatically go to the negative. But when you recall a time you were in a similar situation that you mastered, it moves you into your C-Spot where you feel calm, courage and confidence. Remembering past victories shifts your outlook and helps you scale obstacles. Reflect on past challenges you overcame in your career climb. Point to lessons learned and underscore ways you grew stronger through hard knocks.

Micro doses of self-compassion. One of the best medicines against stress and burnout is giving yourself regular doses of kindness. An arm around your shoulder is good medicine to co-exist with your inner critic’s oppression—not someone else’s arm; your own supportive arm. Talk yourself off the ledge as you would speak to a close friend when you're uncertain; give yourself an “atta-boy” or “atta-girl” after success; soothe yourself after you fail, miss a deadline, or make a mistake; throw yourself a thumbs-up every time you finish a project, reach a successful

milestone, or accomplish a goal. Studies show that attacking yourself after a setback reduces your chances of rebounding. Instead of attacking yourself when things fall apart, a self-compassionate voice helps you bounce back and propels you closer to your career goals.

Naming body sensations. Our negativity bias inclines us to pay attention to negative things and to ignore the positives. Sensing into pleasant and neutral sensations embodies positivity, tells you where you are in space and time, and strengthens your C-Spot. Take a drink of something. Pay attention as it hits your tongue and track it as it moves down the back of your throat into your stomach. Notice how far down you can sense the drink. Can you name the sensations? Hot, cold, tingly, slippery? How thick or thin is it? Rub your palms together for thirty seconds then hold them away from each other and notice the sensation. Name the sensations: warm, tingly, spacious, light. Now hum for a while. Again, pay attention to the body sensations such as tingling, relaxed, or lightness. After these sensing exercises, bring you awareness inside your body and just notice. Paying attention to sensations is what forms new connections and rewires pathways in your brain. And the power is being intentional about noticing. That’s what makes it stick. What do you notice about your breathing, heart rate, or muscle tension?

Stress Needle. Sometimes we stress over little things as if they're bigger than they are, but we don't realize it. Gauging your threat needle brings your thinking brain onboard to regulate extreme reactions. When you ask yourself if a situation is worth losing it, it gives you a change of perspective, brings your thinking brain online and helps you separate small stuff from big stuff. Think of a 10-point scale:

0-3 (mild) 4-7 (medium) 8-10 (major)

Everyday setbacks such as a printer paper jam might be a 2 but you react as if it's an 8 by slamming your fist. A quick mental assessment allows your thinking brain to dwarf your emotional brain and bring instant calm. A traffic jam causing you to be late for a meeting might be a 4 and jamming your hand in a car door slam needing surgery might be a 9. So whether it's a paper jam, traffic jam or car door jam, they are all jams but different degrees of threat and severity. Recognizing your stress needle gives you an instant way to respond appropriately to a situation.

H-A-L-T. When signs of fatigue take hold, stop and ask yourself if you are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired**. This alert signal can bring you back into balance. If one or a combination of the four states is present, slow down, take a few breaths and chill. If you're hungry, take the time to eat. If you're angry, address it in a healthy manner. If you're lonely, reach out to someone you trust. And if you're tired, rest.

Your “to-be” list. The compulsion for constant doing defends you from feeling unpleasant emotions and gives you safety and security even if the task itself is satisfying. When you commit to a less stressful life, you notice you can just be without requiring yourself to constantly do. Make a “*to-be list*” to accompany your “*to-do*” list. Watch a sunset or a bird build its nest, listen to nature sounds around you or feel a breeze against your face. These activities recharge your batteries and contribute to job success.

High-five your tallcomings. When your thoughts constantly focus on your shortcomings, you become blind to your strengths and talents. To offset this imbalance, make a list of your "tallcomings" alongside your shortcomings. There's a reason the word "shortcomings" is in Webster's but "tallcomings" isn't. There's no such word. We get in the habit of ignoring our positive attributes and clobbering ourselves with negatives, creating a flawed view of who we are. It's important to have a critical eye, accept constructive feedback, and recognize your strengths and limitations without dropping your head in your hands. Make it a habit to throw modesty out the window and name what you're good at, the skills and talents you possess, and what you've achieved that your negativity bias has constantly overshadowed.

Sitting with feelings. Identify a disappointment or dissatisfaction that pops up regularly or one that has stuck with you lately. Instead of avoiding or ignoring it as many busy people do, go inward, and welcome it. Sit with it in nonjudgmental awareness just as you might provide bedside company for a sick friend. Get to know this part of you with as much compassion as you can. Don't try to get rid of it or fix it. Simply be present with as much awareness as possible and discover what you can learn about the feeling. Every time a thought or body sensation pulls you away, gently bring your attention back to the feeling again. After a few minutes, you might notice that the bothersome feeling isn't as strong as before.

Self-Affirmations. In 2014, Clayton Critcher and David Dunning at the University of California at Berkeley conducted a series of studies showing that positive affirmations function as "cognitive expanders," bringing a wider perspective to diffuse the brain's tunnel vision of self-threats. Their findings show that affirmations help us transcend the zoom-lens mode by engaging the wide-angle lens of the mind. Self-affirmations helped research participants cultivate a long-distance relationship with their judgment voice and see themselves more fully in a broader self-view, bolstering their self-worth.

Wide-Angle Lens. A broad view expands your perspective, allowing you to build on the many positive aspects in your life. Think of a camera. You can replace the zoom lens which focuses on the stressors by putting on a wide-angle lens which absorbs stressors by helping you see bigger possibilities. Avoid blowing disappointments out of perspective; look for the upside of a downside situation; underscore positive feedback instead of letting it roll off; focus on work solutions instead of problems; pinpoint opportunity in a daily challenge; refuse to let one bad outcome rule your outlook.

W-A-I-T. The acronym WAIT is a quick and easy shortcut, to bring positive action to automatic negative reactions: **W**atch what's going on inside when stress triggers you. Once you're *aware* of it, *acknowledge* the feeling with something like, "I see you're reactive." **A**llow, instead of resist, your initial inner reaction just as it is. **I**nvite it to calm down and soothe it by talking it off the ledge. **T**ell it in a compassionate mental whisper, "I'm here, too, and I've got this."

Rapid Reset. After a jolting situation, Rapid Reset grounds you and calms you down. In your chair, grab the bottom of the seat with both hands and pull up while pushing down with your bottom at the same time. In a fight-or-flight situation, this type of grounding quickly brings you back into space and time.

The Butterfly Hug. Think of a small worry, problem or concern that has been bugging you—not a big kahuna. After you’ve chosen something small, cross your arms over your chest and flap your hands against your shoulders. Turn your attention to the right and find something to focus on. It doesn’t matter what it is. It could be a wall, painting, carpet, or some aspect of nature. As you focus on the object pay attention to it in detail for about 20 seconds. Notice the shape, size, colors and see it as vividly in your mind’s eye as you can. Then turn to your left and focus your attention on something else for another 20 seconds. Take in as much of the detail of the object as you can. Keep flapping your butterfly wings as you continue the exercise. Now, turn to your right again and focus on another object and pay attention to all the details: shape, colors, size, and so forth. Then turn again to your left and repeat your focus on another object for about 20 seconds. After you’ve finished the exercise, recall the worry or concern. At first, you might have difficulty remembering the original concern, or it might take you some time to remember it. And once you do recall, chances are the original concern will have lost much of its power. Why? The exercise of present-moment awareness activated your parasympathetic nervous system and put the brakes on your lizard brain concern. Once the red alert gets turned off, you have more access to your C-Spot, where you feel calm, clarity, and cool-headedness.

Resourcing. One tool that harnesses your innate ability to override workday threats is called “resourcing”—anything that helps you feel better or provides comfort. An *internal resource* is something positive inside of you that you intentionally recognize such as a talent, trait, or ability. An *external resource* is something outside of you such as a loved one, a place, a memory, or a pet. Resourcing puts the brakes on your fight-or-flight response, shifts you into your C-Spot, and often puts you into an Awe state. The first step is to bring to mind something that sustains and nurtures you such as a memory from your favorite vacation or the face of your furry friend when you rub his belly. Or think of an exceptional talent or trait that you value, which could be your ability to smile at a stranger on the street or your listening skills. Then redirect your attention to the accompanying pleasant or calming sensations felt inside and focus on those sensations for a minute or two. You can reset your nervous system anytime you feel like you’re about to hit the roof by using these three steps: (A) Bring to mind a person, place, pet, or strong personal quality that gives you strength or joy (B) (C) Hold that resource in your mind’s eye while paying attention to the pleasant sensations. Notice your slowed breath, heart rate, and muscle tension.

Open And Closed Body Posture. Think of a problem that’s nagging you. Then in a private space, put your body into a posture that reflects from the outside how it feels inside. As you take that posture, notice how it feels inside and how your body corresponds to those feelings. Next, think of a time when everything was going great, and you were on top of the world. Place your posture to conform to what it felt like on the inside. Try to let go and allow your body to take over the form of your feelings. Notice how the stress of the first posture closed you down and the lifting of the oppression of the second posture opened you up. As you take in this realization, remember that maintaining an open posture even in dire circumstances can contribute to your confidence to scale the obstacle.

Noticing Your Thoughts. Suppose you’re facing a stressful event and you hear a voice in your head say, “You’re going to screw up.” Instead of automatically believing the thought, you simply notice it with curiosity, not as a fact for a few seconds. When you notice you’re feeling pressure or in an unpleasant emotional state—such as worry, anger, or frustration—holding these parts of you at arm’s length and observing them impartially as a separate aspect of you, activates your thrive talk (clarity, compassion, calm). Thinking of them much as you might observe a blemish

on your hand allows you to be curious about where they came from. Instead of pushing away, ignoring, or steamrolling over the unpleasant thoughts, the key is to acknowledge them with something like, “Hello frustration, I see you’re active today.” This simple acknowledgment relaxes you so you can face the real hardship—whatever triggered them in the first place. When you are noticing your thoughts, instead of thinking your thoughts, you start to feel the separation and lack of stress. This psychological distance flips the switches from your survive brain to your thrive brain at which point you are calm, clear-minded, compassionate, perform competently, and have more confidence and courage.

Grounding. After a reaction to an upsetting event, you might feel out of your body or in some other way ungrounded. This mindfulness practice helps you feel connected to the earth and brings your prefrontal cortex back online. Find a comfortable sitting position in a chair with a back to it. Sitting up straight, notice how the back of the chair is supporting your back. Bring your full attention to that area of support and focus there for one minute. Then bring your attention to your feet resting on the floor. Pay attention to the bottom of your feet and the support of the ground or floor underneath. Focus on that area of support for one minute. Next bring your attention to your bottom on the chair. Focus on the support of the chair underneath your seat for one minute. After you ground, take another minute to notice the sensations of your breathing, heart rate, and muscle tone. Most people say they feel more relaxed, more in their bodies, and that breathing and heart rate slow down and muscles loosen.

Chair Yoga. You can recharge your batteries with yoga right at your desk in the very chair you’re in as long as it has a back. Sitting in your chair, inhale and raise your arms toward the ceiling. Let your shoulder blades slide down your back as you reach upward with your fingertips. Anchor your sit bones in your seat and reach up from there. Place your left hand over on your right knee. Place your right arm on the back of the chair. Stretch lightly for sixty seconds with eyes open or closed. Notice the stretch and what happens inside. After sixty seconds, bring your body back to center. Then reverse the stretch. Place your right hand over your left knee. Put your left arm on the back of the chair for another sixty seconds. Stretch lightly again with eyes open or closed. Pay attention to the stretch, and notice what happens inside. After three to five minutes of repeating this exercise, you will notice a renewed energy and mental clarity then you’re ready to get back in the game.

The 20-20-20 rule. The 20-20-20 rule says that for every 20 minutes spent looking at a screen, you take a 20 second break, move around and look at something 20 feet away, which relaxes the eye muscles for 20 seconds and gives your brain a much-needed respite. Here’s how the rule works: Set an alarm or time popup for every 20 minutes when you’re working in front of a screen as a reminder to get up from your workstation, deep breathe, and stretch. It takes 20 seconds for your eyes to fully relax. Studies show Microbreaks between meetings—stretching, glancing out a window, eating a snack, walking around the block—keeps stress from building and the brain a chance to reset.

The 3-to-1 ratio rule. Scientists have discovered that negativity has a longer shelf life than positivity, and it takes three positive thoughts to offset one negative thought. When negativity is left to its devices, you’re more likely to store a threatening, negative memory than a positive one after just one episode—all in the name of survival. According to Dr. Barbara Frederickson, positivity researcher at the University of North Carolina, for every heart-wrenching negative

emotional experience you endure, you need to experience at least three heartfelt positive emotional experiences that uplift you. Known as broaden-and-build, this rule isn't trading bad thoughts for positive ones but changing the scope of your mind to widen the span of career possibilities.

The 120-minute rule. Getting outside in nature for *green time* after prolonged periods of *screen time* is restorative. Mounting research shows that 120 minutes a week in nature—parks, woodlands, or beaches—clears a fatigued brain and promotes physical and mental well-being. The two hours can be spent in one block or spread out over the entire week to get the shock absorbing benefit.

The 10-10-10 rule. This rule helps you avoid emotional snap decisions and consider the long-range consequences of your choices instead of just the short term. Consider three steps before making a difficult career decision: How will you feel about the decision in 10 minutes? How will you feel about it in 10 months and then ten years from now? Emotions often rule in the 10-minute short term because your emotional brain throws your rational brain off line. When you consider 10 months and 10 years, you start to have more access to your prefrontal cortex or executive functioning, which gives you a bigger perspective with more possibilities to consider how your decision will play out.

Micro-adjustments and conscious choices. When we're not in the present moment, we don't notice the micro-adjustments that we always have the choice to make, causing us to feel like decisions are being made for us, "I'm getting tired and don't feel like I can make it through the workday" becomes "Maybe I'll work from home today" Or "I think I'll take a mental health day." Another example: "I'm feeling so disconnected at work" becomes "I'm gonna make sure I do something that will make me feel connected to a coworker today." When you're mindfully present, you make these little micro-adjustments that help everything work together better versus we may not be present and don't notice until suddenly one of them hits and react instead of making conscious choices.

Stop second zingers in their tracks. We've all had the experience of a career disappointment or colleague setting us off. A manager makes a rude comment; a co-worker talks over us in a meeting; we have a computer glitch, and we lose our temper. When we're under stress, two zingers fly our way. The *first zinger* is the stressful situation, and the *second zinger* is our reaction. With the second zinger comes the ability to choose our actions, but we often zing ourselves anyway, causing self-inflicted stress. Suppose your boss takes credit for your idea. You react by lowering the boom on her. The second zinger—while your upset is perfectly understandable—only adds insult to injury, making you say or do something you might later regret. After you pay attention to your first and second zingers for a while, you develop an inner sense of separation from the urge to react. You start to feel disappointment without frustration or acting out. It keeps you from adding more stress on top of stress and gives you the clarity to take appropriate action to mitigate the first zinger.

Source: copyright Bryan Robinson. *#Chill: Turn Off Your Job and Turn On Your Life* (New York: William Morrow, 2019).