

For more information, or to receive the Chicago Torture Justice Center's monthly newsletter, send us a letter.

Chicago Torture Justice Center  
6337 S. Woodlawn  
Chicago, IL 60637

We would like to thank the wonderful educators and organizations whose work we drew from in creating this booklet.

- ❖ Mindfulness information and ways to 'tap the breaks' are from David Treleaven and his book *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing*.
- ❖ Aikido exercises are from Francisco Marques, available at [http://www.fixback.com/\\_Media/aikido-exercises.pdf](http://www.fixback.com/_Media/aikido-exercises.pdf).
- ❖ Inspiration and select wellness activities come from the Silvia Rivera Law Project's self-care guide, available at <https://srjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Self-Care-on-the-Inside-Guide.pdf>.
- ❖ Clip art images are from Vector Toons.



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## Wellness on the Inside

Tips and Activities to Care for Yourself

Chicago Torture Justice Center  
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Chicago, IL 60637  
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## Have your rights been violated?

You have a right to access medical care in prison, including mental health care. If your rights have been violated, here are some organizations to contact.

1

**Uptown People's Law Center**  
4413 N. Sheridan Rd.  
Chicago IL 60640

2

**John Howard Association**  
P.O. Box 10042  
Chicago, IL 60610-0042  
(312) 291-9183 (10AM-4PM M-F)

3

**Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR)**  
6353 S. Cottage Grove Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60637

4

**Equip for Equality**  
ATTN: Intake  
20 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60602  
*(This organization only serves people with disabilities, which includes mental and physical disabilities.)*



## Creativity

Whether it's writing, drawing, or making music, expressing our story can be an important tool to help us work through emotion, pain, or oppression. Turning our pain into creativity can be a powerful experience – both for us and for others we share with.



Everyone has different ways to express themselves so find what inspires you! Here are some ideas:

- ❖ Write letters to your idols, your past or future self, people who changed you and may not even realize it. You can always write to your support team at CTJC at the address on this booklet. In the letters, say what you wish you had known or said, what you want to say or do one day. You can choose to send these letters, keep them, or destroy them.
- ❖ Read stories that take place in places very different than where you are. Picture life there vividly in your mind.
- ❖ Draw a timeline of your life. Include when you met the people who are most important to you.
- ❖ Make music! Anything can be an instrument-- get creative.
- ❖ If words are difficult, use your body to express what is inside you. Try wiggling or tapping your toes and fingers, stretching, or shaking out your arms and legs.
- ❖ Do you have a favorite series or type of book? Follow their lead and write your own story in that world.

## Who Are We?

The Chicago Torture Justice Center (CTJC) is a community center for Chicago police torture survivors and anyone who has experienced police violence. CTJC was established as a result of a historic Reparations Ordinance passed by the Chicago City Council in May 2015 and serves survivors of police torture, their family members, and community members. CTJC is the first community center in the United States that provides specialized trauma services to those tortured by law enforcement officers within the country. We are a part of and support a movement to end all forms of police violence.

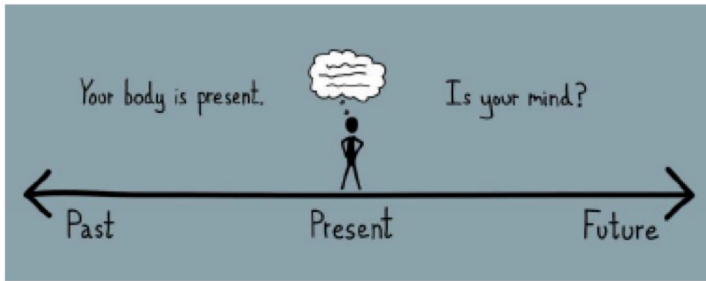


## What is this?

This guide is meant to help you do what you can to take care of yourself while in prison. We know there is a lot out of your control right now and you are doing your best to get through it. This guide focuses on giving some practical tools you can use for your mind, body and emotions. Not all the activities will apply to you, so take what is useful and forget the rest! Wellness can be difficult in prison, but you have been through a lot, and you have survived.

# Mind

Meditation and mindfulness help you to take your body and brain back from systems of oppression. This section will give you some techniques to focus your mind and stay in the present moment. With practice over time, these techniques may help you get through difficult situations when you feel swept up and overwhelmed.



## Meditation

Meditation is a practice that allows the mind to notice *what is*. Find a time when you have some time to yourself without feeling too vulnerable. Start by sitting or lying down and allow yourself to become still, relaxed, and alert. Close your eyes or rest them gently on one spot. Try to focus your attention on one simple thing (which we call an 'anchor'). It can be anything, but two good places to start if you are new to meditation are either focusing on your breathing or on a word or phrase (called a mantra) that you repeat over and over to yourself during your meditation. Some examples could be "I am loved" or "I am enough."

## 5-4-3-2-1

This is an exercise to bring you back to what is physically happening around you through your five senses. This can be especially good if you are caught up in your thoughts or feel disconnected from your body.

### Name

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you touch
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you smell
- 1 thing you taste

## Telephone

Plant your feet firmly on the ground. Physically hold an object and try to describe each detail of it out loud like you would to someone on the phone who has never seen it. Try this with a comforting object like a blanket or a favorite picture. Now try it with an object that is cold. Try it with an object that is rough.





# Grounding

These next three activities are for times you are upset or overwhelmed. When we are overwhelmed, our bodies are on high alert. You might notice your heart racing, breathing faster, or your muscles clenched. If there is danger around, this high alert helps us stay safe, but what about when our thoughts or memories are the thing overwhelming us? In these situations, here are some techniques to try to calm your body down and get a little relief.



## Breathing Exercises

If you feel worked up, notice how you are breathing. Is your breath faster than usual, shallow, or it feels like you can't get air? Try inhaling slowly through your nose for a count of four, then exhale through your mouth for a count of four. You might focus your attention on your chest, feeling it rise for 4 and lower for 4. Try resting a hand on your chest or belly to feel the movement. Try to just focus on your breath in this moment. You can also do this breathing exercise daily to relax, and deep breathing can have health benefits like lower blood pressure, too!

*Fill in your own mantra.*

As you meditate, your mind will wander, and that's okay! Try to allow these thoughts to pass by, like clouds floating away or cars passing on the road. Your only job when you practice meditation is to bring your attention back when you notice that it strayed from your anchor.

For many people, anxiety or difficult memories or feelings come up when they meditate. Meditation doesn't always make you feel relaxed—just more aware. Try to simply observe what happens in your mind and body rather than fight it. If meditating does relax you, great! But don't get too caught up in 'doing it right'. Of course, the point is to take care of yourself, so if meditation makes you feel worse, try a different activity instead that works for you.

### Ways to tap the brakes when meditation gets intense

- Shorter practice periods
- Try a soothing form of touch, like your hand on your heart
- Open your eyes to help you stay in touch with what is happening around you
- Take breaks in the middle to walk or stretch
- Take a few slow, deep breaths down to your belly

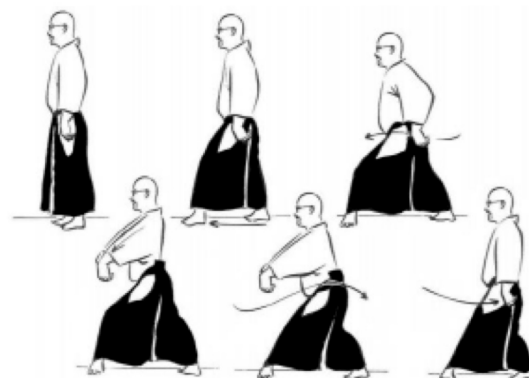
## Mindfulness

Mindfulness isn't a specific thing you do. Instead, it's how you do something. Plan a task you can do mindfully today, like washing a dish or walking down a certain hall. Notice the texture of the dish and temperature of the water. What sounds or smells do you notice? Focus all your attention and care on what is happening right then.

You may find that your mind has wandered to the past or future or judgements about how 'well' you are doing. When you notice this, gently bring your focus back to the present. You can choose any task to do mindfully, from noticing each footstep to feeling the textures as you make your bed. Try doing one task every day mindfully to live *on purpose* rather than going through the motions.



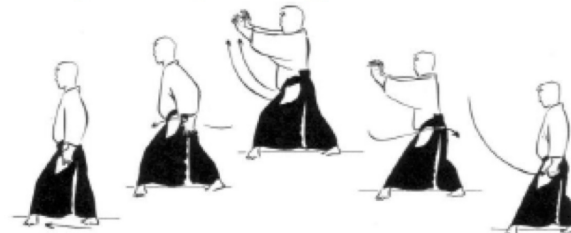
### 4. Funicogi Undo (Rowing) for POWER



Step your left foot forward. Rest your hands at the hips, fingers closing into a half-fist. Then thrust your hips forward, shifting weight to your left leg. Your right leg behind will

straighten and your left leg knee will bend. Your arms follow the motion of your hips. Your upper body stays straight and tall. Pull your hips back, straightening your left leg and bending your right leg behind. Your arms again follow the motion of your hips. While your body is moving forward and backward, your arms will make an "figure 8" motion. Do this movement 4 times, then switch sides.

### 5. Ikkyo Undo (Arm Lift) for ENERGY



Take a small step forward with your left foot, pushing your hips forward.

Bend your left leg and straighten your right leg behind. Swing your arms forward and up, fingers extended and energy flowing out through the fingertips and beyond. Your arms should stop naturally at about eye level. At the count of three, shift your hips back, the weight of your body shifting back to the right leg, which will bend. Your left leg will straighten. Swing your arms back to your sides, following your hip motion, fingers closing into half-fists.



These pages show a *sample workout* from a Japanese martial art called aikido. Aikido means "the way of unifying with life energy" or "the way of harmonious spirit". Aikido emphasizes whole-body movement with mental focus. We are not experts in martial arts or aikido and these exercises aren't endorsed by a sensei for this booklet, but this is one place you could start.

### 1. Sayu Udefuri Undo (Body Twist) for **BODY AWARENESS**



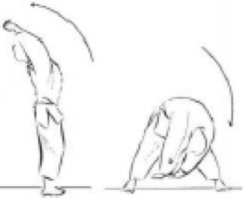
Stand with your feet apart. Swing both arms to the left, then right. Turn your body, including your head (leading with the hips) without moving your feet. Twist to the sides, feeling all the parts of your body moving in sync. Notice the circle your arms make and the space around your body.

### 2. Sayu Jotai Shincho Undo (Side Stretch) for **LENGTHENING**



Swing your left arm up and over, bending your body sideways. Feel the muscles lengthen in your side and arm. Do not force the stretch or make jerky movements. Feel the gentle pull in your muscles. Hold for 10 seconds, then reach up to the sky for 10 seconds, then to the opposite side.

### 3. Zengo Jotai Shincho Undo (Heaven & Earth) for **RELEASE**



Stand with your feet apart. Swing your arms up and over your head, bending as far back as possible. Then swing forward and toward the ground. Keep the knees bent and do not stiffen or force the stretch.

## Reflecting

If your thoughts seem very fast or scattered, it can help to describe facts about your day to yourself. Include small things that you did and give yourself credit for all the work you put into surviving the day. (Today I woke up. I opened my eyes, and I got out of my bed. I made my bed. I washed my hands and splashed water on my face, etc.). This kind of detailed description can help remind you of the many things you have power and control over, even when so much is out of your control in prison. Those are choices you make to take care of yourself, and you deserve credit for them! Writing a list may help you feel more grounded and slow down your thoughts.

### Things I've done today

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓



# Body

One key to caring for your body under stress is to be aware of what is happening in your body. We have included information here about how to do a body scan, exercise, and grounding techniques to stay in touch with your body.



## Body Scan

Stress can keep parts of our bodies tense, even when we don't realize it. A body scan is a way of noticing where your body is tense and starting to let that tension go. Lay down or sit in a restful position, and take a few slow, deep breaths to settle in. Then bring your attention to your feet. Wiggle your toes and try to feel each individual toe and part of your foot. If you don't feel anything, that's ok too. Tense your feet and squeeze the muscles tight for a couple seconds, then let go.

Do the same with each part of your body, moving up to your calves, thighs, lower back, shoulders, then to your arms, neck, and face. Each time, when you squeeze a muscle and let go, imagine a bit of the stress that has built up in that part of your body dissolving away. You may still feel tension or aches and pains, and that's normal. Medical studies show that acknowledging pain rather than fighting or suppressing it can make the pain feel less intense. At the end of the body scan, take a few moments to feel your breath and return to the world around you.

# Exercises

Here are a few exercises with the goal of feeling more energized and aware of your body. If you work out a lot, you're probably familiar with pushups, sit-ups, and other exercises for muscle strength. But health and wellness aren't just about having big muscles. Wellness is also about paying attention to your body and finding ways to feel more alive and comfortable in your own skin.



The exercises in this booklet were chosen to help you feel reinvigorated and aware. Rather than rushing through or pushing yourself, focus on feeling the length, power, and control in your muscles.

Try going through each exercise slowly and with control, feeling your muscles flex and stretch as you move, taking deep breaths throughout. Feel your power and energy as your whole body moves together in coordinated motions. Notice how you feel after doing these exercises, such as if it affects your mood, energy level, motivation, or sleep.

You can also take these exercises as inspiration to move your body in a way that work *for you*. You know your body better than anyone else does. If an exercise is painful or doesn't feel useful to you, skip it or change it to suit your body, including any disabilities or injuries you have. It's all about finding what feels good to you.