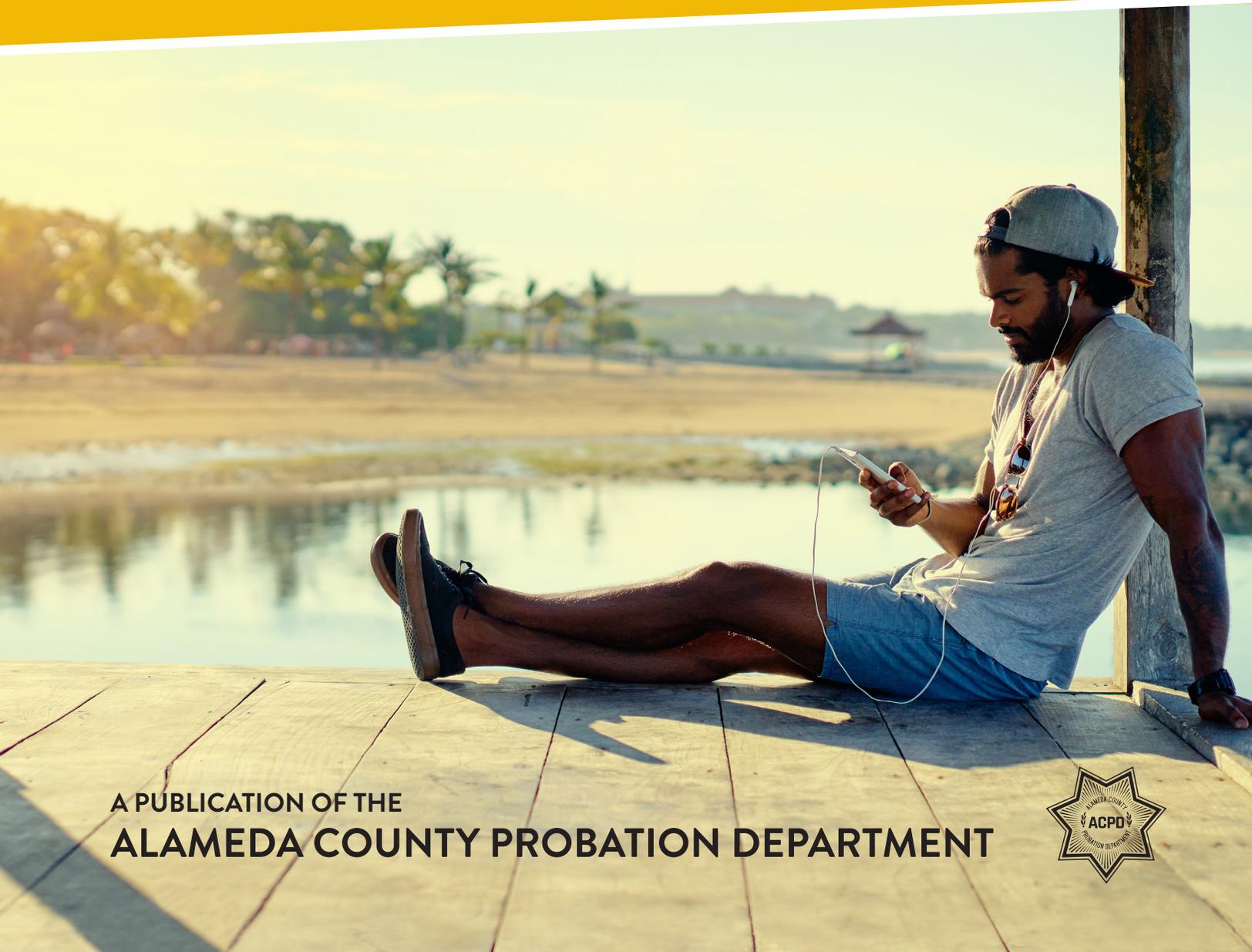


The Path Home Series: Workbook 1

# TAKING CARE OF ONE'S SELF

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Strategies for physical and psychological wellbeing



A PUBLICATION OF THE  
**ALAMEDA COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT**





# TAKING CARE OF ONE'S SELF

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## Strategies for physical and psychological wellbeing

### *The Path Home Series: Workbook 1*

*Taking Care of One's Self* is Workbook 1 in a four-part series of pre-release workbooks developed by the Alameda County Probation Department as a project of the Pathways Home initiative. The content in this workbook is available for other probation departments and reentry programs to adapt. For permission, please contact the Alameda County Probation Department's Reentry and Community Outreach Unit.

**About the Pathways Home Initiative:** The Pathways Home initiative is a first-of-its-kind partnership between the Alameda County Probation Department and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), which aims to improve the reentry process for clients returning to Alameda County from prison and jail. The initiative was partially funded by a Second Chance Act grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. For more information and to download copies of [Welcome Home: Alameda County Reentry Resource Directory](#), visit the department's website at [www.probation.acgov.org](http://www.probation.acgov.org).

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\*ACPD's use of these graphics and content does not constitute endorsement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Labor, or the United States Government.

# CONTENTS

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Glossary	6
Introduction	8
PART 1: What is mental health?	12
PART 2: Evaluating your mental health and getting treatment	20
PART 3: Trauma and its after-effects	32
PART 4: Spiritual health and self-care techniques	38
PART 5: Physical health and nutrition	50
PART 6: Drug and alcohol dependency	60
PART 7: Your health and well-being plan	68
Appendix	74

# GLOSSARY

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## **Anxiety**

A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an upcoming event or something with an uncertain outcome.

## **Attention Deficit Disorder**

A condition that causes symptoms like poor concentration, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

## **Cognitive behavioral treatment**

A form of therapy that helps a person recognize their distorted thinking, change their behavior patterns, and learn strategies for coping with difficult situations.

## **Depression**

A common mental illness that causes feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in activities a person once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can make it challenging for a person to function at work and at home. If untreated, depression can lead to thoughts of suicide.

## **Flashback**

A flashback is a vivid, often negative memory that may appear without warning.

## **Fentanyl**

A powerful synthetic opioid that is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times stronger. It is a prescription drug that is also made and used illegally. Like morphine, it is typically used to treat patients with severe pain, especially after surgery.

## **Hypervigilance**

Being extra sensitive or alert to possible dangers, whether from people or the environment. People with post-traumatic stress disorder are often hypervigilant.

## **Mindfulness**

A mental state achieved by focusing a person's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting all feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Mindfulness is often used as a therapeutic technique.

## **Neurotransmitters**

Chemical signals in the central nervous system that are sent between nerve cells in a person's brain to control a person's mood and bodily functions.

## Opioids

A class of drugs that are used to reduce pain. They include heroin, fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine. Opioids are highly addictive, and persistent use and high doses can be deadly.

## Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)

The process of taking medicine to prevent HIV after a possible exposure. PEP should be used only in emergency situations and must be started within 72 hours after a possible exposure to HIV.

## Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

A condition of persistent mental and emotional stress that happens as a result of severe psychological shock. PTSD can cause problems with sleep, flashbacks of the experience, and bouts of uncontrollable anger.

## Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)

The process of taking a daily pill to prevent a person from contracting HIV. The pill (brand name Truvada) contains two medicines (tenofovir and emtricitabine) that are used in combination with other medicines to treat HIV.

## Psychiatrist

A medical doctor who specializes in treating psychological disorders. Unlike a counselor, a psychiatrist can prescribe medicines.

## Psychological triggers

A trigger is a reminder of a past trauma. This reminder can cause a person to feel overwhelming sadness, anxiety, or panic. It may also cause someone to relive the traumatic experience through flashbacks.

## Sexually transmitted disease (STD)

An infection that is passed from one person to another through sexual contact. This usually happens through vaginal, oral, and anal sex. Some STDs can spread through skin-to-skin contact.

## Trauma

An emotional response to a terrible experience like an accident, abuse, rape, or a natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

## Yoga

A physical, mental, and spiritual practice that comes from ancient India. It is a mind-body exercise that consists of a series of poses combined with breathing techniques and meditation.

# INTRODUCTION

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Soon you will finish serving your time in jail or prison and be able to go back to your community. As you await your release, you have time to plan what you are going to do when you get out.

***The earlier you begin thinking about leaving jail or prison, the more likely you will be to have a successful transition back to the community.***

Returning home after being in prison or jail can be challenging. When you get out, you need to find housing and probably get a job, reconnect with family, and build a social network that is positive and supportive.

This can be daunting even when you're healthy, but if you are not healthy, it can feel impossible.

Your probation officer or parole agent is here to help you when you get out. You can help yourself by taking care of your mental and physical health.

***Give yourself the best chance at success by making sure you have a healthy body and mind.***

“

*If I am not good to myself, how can I expect anyone else to be good to me?*

- Maya Angelou

”



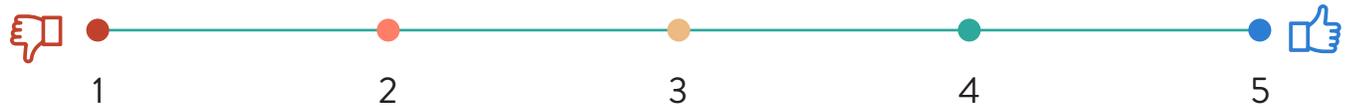
## THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Our emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical health are all connected. They each play a part in our overall well-being.

How we feel in our body affects our energy and mood, and our moods have physical effects. If we are depressed, we may eat less or we may overeat. We may feel tired and not want to be social. When we're anxious, we may feel amped up and have trouble sleeping.

Taking care of the health of your mind is especially important during difficult times. When we have high levels of stress, we become vulnerable to illness and disease. Take a moment to check in with yourself right now:

**How do you feel right now on a scale of 1 to 5? (Circle one)**



**Are your thoughts troubling you?**

Yes  No

**Do you feel nervous or worried?**

Yes  No

**Do you feel sad or depressed?**

Yes  No

**How does your body feel?**

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**Do you have any symptoms that are bothering you? What are they?**

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Getting healthy isn't always easy. Sticking to a new health or fitness plan is challenging, especially when we are stuck in unhealthy habits.

Some obstacles are out of our control, like lack of access to health care. In the United States, people from low-income backgrounds, especially people of color, often don't have the same access to quality health care as people from higher incomes. This is because of high health insurance costs and lack of information about health resources. As a result, they may suffer more from the effects of treatable illness and diseases.

*Don't let inequalities stand in the way of your health.*

Affordable health care and health resources are available to you in Alameda County. Your probation officer or parole agent will help connect you to these resources.

## THE GOALS OF THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook will guide you in taking care of your mental and physical health. The objective is to help you:

- ✔ Understand what affects mental health and learn to identify common mental health challenges
- ✔ Evaluate your own mental health and learn about options for medical diagnosis, treatment, and support
- ✔ Learn self-care techniques for psychological well-being
- ✔ Learn about trauma and explore how traumatic experiences impact your life
- ✔ Learn strategies for improving your physical health and nutrition
- ✔ Learn about drug and alcohol treatment
- ✔ Develop goals for your mental and physical health and make a plan to achieve them

## GUIDING BELIEFS

Before we begin, we want to share a few beliefs that guide this workbook:

- ▶ We believe that everyone deserves affordable and good quality healthcare regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, income, or criminal record.
- ▶ We acknowledge that people impacted by the justice system, particularly people of color from low-income communities, often experience unequal access to affordable and high-quality medical care. As a result, many mental and physical illnesses go undiagnosed and untreated.
- ▶ We believe that mental and physical health are the foundation of a successful reentry.
- ▶ We believe that good mental and physical health requires knowledge, planning, and ongoing effort.

## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

The exercises in this workbook have been developed to help you begin to think through and plan for your release. They are also a good way for you and your probation officer or parole agent to get to know each other and develop strategies for your transition out of prison or jail.

You can work on this workbook at your own pace. If you get stuck or find an exercise difficult or unhelpful, take a break. You can come back to it later and try again.



# PART 1:

## What is mental health?

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Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Your mental health affects how you think, feel, and act. It affects how you relate to others.

Being mentally healthy means you are feeling good, your thoughts aren't troubling you, and your social life and relationships are going okay.

### UNDERSTANDING THE BRAIN

A healthy mind starts with a healthy brain.

The human brain is like a computer that controls the mind and body. It has billions of nerve cells that send out chemical signals called neurotransmitters to manage your body's functions, including breathing, walking, sleeping, eating, and concentrating.



Different kinds of neurotransmitters do different things. Three important ones that affect how we feel are *dopamine*, *serotonin*, and *endorphins*.

- ▶ **Serotonin** regulates mood, sleep, anxiety, and appetite.
- ▶ **Endorphins** give us a sense of extreme happiness, reduce pain, calm us down, and help us sleep.
- ▶ **Dopamine** motivates us and gives us pleasure.

When the chemicals in your brain are out of balance, it can cause mental health issues like depression or anxiety.



## MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

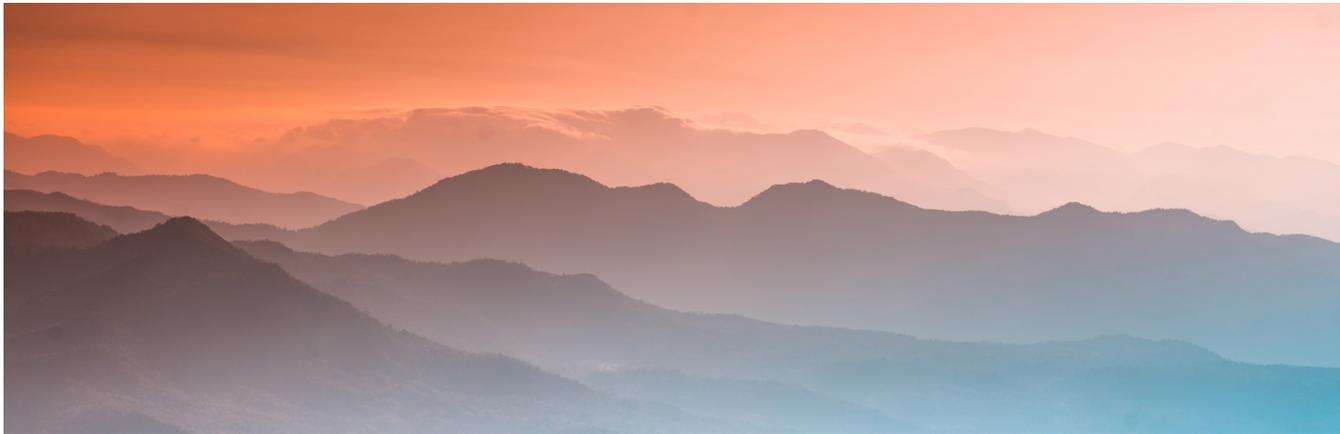
About 20 percent of adults in the United States suffer from a mental health issue at any given time. It's difficult to find housing or a job after your release if you are depressed or dealing with anxiety. Some people try to deal with their mental health issues by self-medicating with recreational drugs or alcohol. Drugs may give you a high for a minute, but they will damage your mental health even more.

*A healthy lifestyle and medical care are the only ways to effectively take care of mental health issues.*

Belonging to supportive groups, getting sunlight and exercise, eating a nutritious diet, and getting enough sleep and social interaction can help maintain a healthy balance of chemicals in your brain. When a chemical imbalance in the brain is severe, sometimes medication is necessary. Anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications can help. They can be prescribed by a doctor.

## Depression

Depression is a common mental illness that can make you feel sad, worthless, hopeless, or tired. People with depression often don't feel pleasure in doing things they once enjoyed. Depression can be mild, or it can be so severe that you are unable to function.



Depression looks and feels different in everyone. Some people sleep all day. Some people can't sleep. Some people lose their appetite. Some people gain weight. Others feel irritable or angry. Some people with severe depression think about suicide.

Sometimes, depression may result in unhealthy coping behaviors like abusing drugs or alcohol, committing acts of violence, or taking extreme risks.

Depression can be rooted in trauma or adverse life experiences like poverty, discrimination, or incarceration. It can also be genetic. We don't always know why it happens.

It can feel uncomfortable for some people to discuss their depression. As a result, some people who suffer from depression may avoid diagnosis and refuse treatment.

***If you feel depressed, you are not alone.***

Depression happens to people of all ages, races, and backgrounds. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, if you have a great job or if you're unemployed.

***Admitting you have a problem and asking for help can be hard, but without treatment, depression probably won't go away. And it may get worse.***

***Have you ever felt depressed?***

Yes

No

***How did it affect your behavior?***

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***How did it affect your relationships?***

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***How did it affect your work/school/activities?***

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***What did you do about it?***

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***Did that help?***

Yes

No

## Anxiety

Anxiety can make you feel tense, jumpy, fearful, restless, or irritable. It can cause an upset stomach, shortness of breath, or difficulty sleeping.

It's normal to feel anxiety once in a while. Everybody feels anxious and nervous sometimes. But when it is extreme or out of control, or if it's on a daily basis, it becomes a mental health condition. That's when you need help.

There are different ways that you can manage anxiety:

- ▶ You can talk with a therapist or counselor who can help you find ways of changing thinking and behavior that cause anxiety.
- ▶ Exercise can help by clearing your mind of negative thoughts, calming your nerves, and releasing endorphins that boost your mood.
- ▶ Eating a healthy diet full of fiber helps you grow beneficial bacteria in your stomach, which can lower levels of stress hormones and fight anxiety.
- ▶ There are medications that can treat anxiety.



***When do you have anxiety? How often?***

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***What does anxiety feel like for you?***

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***What do you do about it? Does it help?***

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## Attention Deficit and Disorder (ADD)

ADD is a condition that makes it difficult to focus, follow instructions, and complete tasks. People who have ADD can have a hard time paying attention, sitting still, or waiting. They may have trouble following through with assignments at school and work.

ADD can be treated in a variety of ways, including with medication. To be diagnosed, you must see your doctor for an evaluation.



View of Union City & Fremont



## PART 2:

# Evaluating your mental health and getting treatment

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Only a medical professional can properly diagnose and treat a mental illness, but you can learn what puts you at risk and use that knowledge to stay healthy.

### EVALUATING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

A variety of factors can lead to mental health issues:

- ▶ Genetic factors like a history of mental illness in your family
- ▶ Injury and illness like head trauma, a chronic disease like cancer, or drug and alcohol use
- ▶ Social factors like poverty, racism, inequality, abuse, unstable housing, family separation, exposure to violence, and incarceration
- ▶ Traumatic events like the death of a loved one or being the victim of a crime

What are your risk factors for mental illness? Check all that apply

- Family history of mental health issues
- Poverty and financial worries
- Housing problems
- Family issues
- Job loss or difficulty finding employment
- Racism or discrimination
- Injury or illness
- Trauma
- Food insecurity
- Incarceration



## GETTING TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

If you believe you are having symptoms of depression, anxiety, or any other mental health issue, ask for help. It won't just get better on its own.

The first step is to see a doctor to rule out any medical conditions. Some conditions such as thyroid problems, diabetes, or heart disease can cause psychological symptoms. Once they rule out any medical conditions, your doctor can help you determine if you are suffering from mental health issues.



### Therapy

There are a lot of different licensed professionals who do therapy and counseling – social workers, psychologists, counselors, and mental health nurse practitioners.

Therapists are trained to help people who are suffering from mental health challenges such as uncontrollable anger, negative thoughts, addiction, relationship issues, depression, or other troubling feelings. They try to listen without judgement, they guide you in exploring how you feel, and they help you find solutions to problems in your life.

## How to choose a therapist who is right for you

There are therapists of all races, ethnicities, and genders. And there are many kinds of therapy – individual therapy, group therapy, couples therapy, and family therapy.

*The right therapist for you is someone who you are comfortable with and who you can talk with honestly.*

Things to consider when choosing a therapist:

- ▶ Do they have an office that is easy and safe to get to or a way to connect with them remotely?
- ▶ Are they affordable or free?
- ▶ Are they experienced and qualified?
- ▶ Do they have an understanding and appreciation of your culture (maybe they are your race or they speak your language)?
- ▶ Do they treat you as an equal and a partner in decision-making? Do they show acceptance and compassion?
- ▶ Do they challenge you to think through problems and gently guide you to your goals?



If you are not clicking with your therapist after a few sessions, you can find another one.

There is information on low-cost therapists in [Welcome Home: Alameda County Reentry Resource Directory](#).

Talk to your probation officer or parole agent if you need help setting up therapy appointments. If you are on Medi-Cal, your probation officer or parole agent can help you find out if the cost of therapy and treatment is covered.

## What to expect during your first visit

During your first visit, your therapist will get to know you and understand how you are feeling. They may ask you to describe the issues or symptoms you are experiencing. They may ask questions about your personal life and family history, such as questions about your childhood, relationships, and your living situation.

You can ask them about:

- ▶ What kinds of mental health issues they specialize in
- ▶ What treatment methods they use
- ▶ How much each session costs
- ▶ The number of sessions they think you will have
- ▶ Patient confidentiality

If you feel comfortable with the therapist, you can set goals for working together.

“

*My advice to anyone preparing to leave prison is to join a group. A support group or other type of group. Be around people doing positive things, helping each other. It keeps you focused. It helps you to do the work and stay on track.*

- Keleon Crawford

Served 2 years and 8 months in prison; paroled in May 2019.

”

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

There are other kinds of support available in addition to therapy. You can talk to your pastor, rabbi, imam, or other religious leader. You can join a support group. Or you can get help from your support network.

### ▶ **Support groups**

Support groups are meetings with people who are experiencing similar challenges that are facilitated by a counselor or therapist. In these groups, you can safely discuss what's going on with you and find support from others who are going through similar things.

### ▶ **Your support network**

Your support network includes the people you can go to when you are having a hard time and need advice or emotional support. These should be people who you trust, who have time for you, and who want to help you stay healthy and thrive when you return to the community.

## Your Support Network

Who can you ask to be there for you during your reentry process? Who can you trust to help you? Who can you rely on to help you remain positive, find resources, and cope with setbacks?

Think about what kind of support you may need when you are released and write the names of people who you can ask for help.

Support Person	What they can help you with		
<i>Example: My sister Jane</i>	<i>Rides to appointments</i>	<i>I can stay with her for a few weeks</i>	<i>Getting my documents in order</i>



## MEDICATION

For some people, medication is the right answer to treating mental health issues. It is your choice whether you want to take medication.

Your doctor can prescribe medications for depression or anxiety. For more complex or persistent mental health issues, your doctor or therapist can refer you to a psychiatrist.

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in treating psychological conditions. They can prescribe and monitor medications, and they can also treat more serious mental illnesses. Medications also sometimes have side effects. If you are not able to tolerate the side effects you are having, or if the medication is not working, talk to your doctor. They can change the dose or switch you to a different medication.

*Everyone's body and brain are different, and not all medications work for each person.*

Once you find the right medication for you, make sure to take it regularly. It is normal to forget or get tired of taking medication every day. But missing a dose can reduce or stop a medication's effectiveness, so try to stay on top of it.

Also, be aware that some medications need to be taken for several weeks before they start to take effect. Don't get discouraged if you don't feel better right away.

Every person is different, so finding the right dose and medication can take time. This can be frustrating, but don't give up. You will feel better.

If you are diagnosed with a mental health issue, your doctor will work with you to develop a treatment plan. This can involve both medications and therapy, depending on how severe your symptoms are, how they are affecting you, and what you prefer.



## CULTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Mental illness affects millions of adults of every race and ethnicity in this country. But in some families and cultures, it isn't always talked about.

Some people are uncomfortable talking about their emotions or sharing difficult memories. Others might think that having a mental illness is a weakness or something to be ashamed of.

Similarly, some people might be uncomfortable with the idea of taking medication for mental health. They may think that medication is a form of control, or that it is only used for people from certain ethnic groups or economic backgrounds.

In some cases, people don't get treatment that could reduce their suffering because of distrust of the healthcare system.

The truth is that medications for mental health issues are used by people from all races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds. Actually, wealthy people in the United States are prescribed medications for mental health issues more than people from low-income communities. This is partly because they have good health insurance. It is also because they are better able to access information and advocate for themselves.

It is understandable to be cautious when it comes to your mental health treatment, but when mental illness goes untreated, it can stunt personal growth and damage relationships.



If you seek help from medical professionals who are trained to treat mental health challenges, you will give yourself the best chance of overcoming mental health issues that may be holding you back from living the life you want.

Taking medication to treat your mental health is not any different from taking medicine to recover from an injury or illness that affects your body. Also, talking to a therapist does not have to be uncomfortable. The right therapist should feel like a trusted advisor who listens without judgment and keeps your confidence.

If you are hesitant about seeking help for your mental health, try to find a mental health professional (therapist, doctor, etc.) who shares your culture or background. That may help you feel more comfortable.

***Taking control of your physical and psychological well-being takes courage.***

There is nothing to lose and so much to gain from asking for help.

Tear along dashed line



Garin Regional Park, Hayward



Berkeley Marina



## PART 3:

# Trauma and its after-effects

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Sometimes you may experience psychological suffering because of trauma that happened in your life. Traumatic experiences might include losing a loved one, being a victim of a violence, living in poverty, lacking stable housing, or being separated from your family.

*When an experience is very bad, it can have lasting effects.*

How a traumatic experience affects us is different for each person. Even if the experience happened a long time ago, the lasting trauma might interfere with your ability to manage your emotions in a healthy way.

A therapist can help you explore your trauma and help you understand how it affects you.



## POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

“

*Turn your wounds  
into wisdom.*

*- Oprah Winfrey*

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Most people who go through a traumatic experience have a hard time coping for a while, but they get better after some time has passed. They may never forget the traumatic experience, but they get back on their feet and move on.

Some people, however, do not get better with time. These people develop a mental health condition called post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.

When you have PTSD, you often reexperience the traumatic event in some way. This can happen through nightmares, flashbacks, severe anxiety, or a sudden flood of emotions.

People with PTSD can be overly sensitive, intense, or reactive. They can be unable to control their anger. They may be hypervigilant or extra sensitive to possible dangers, whether from people or the environment, whether real or imagined.



### Psychological triggers

When you have PTSD, you feel fine until something sets you off or ‘triggers’ you. A trigger is like a button that sets off a danger alarm in your brain. The feelings of the trauma may come rushing back. You may become overwhelmed with fear and your heart may start racing.

Different things can trigger a PTSD response. It could be a sound, or smell, or something else in your environment that brings you back to the traumatic experience. It could also just be how you’re feeling.

You may not realize something is a trigger until you have a reaction. A therapist can help you identify your triggers and help you learn ways to cope.

Common PTSD Triggers	
Emotional Triggers	Situational Triggers
Stress	Loud sounds
Memories	An argument
Feeling lonely	Seeing something that reminds you of the traumatic event
Feeling abandoned	Certain smells and tastes
Feeling helpless	The end of a relationship
Frustration	Holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays
Feeling out of control	A specific place
Feeling vulnerable	Seeing someone who is connected to your traumatic event
Pain	

Even if you don't have PTSD, we all have triggers – things that set us off and lead us to overreact or feel attacked.

Try to think of when you last had a reaction. Ask yourself the following questions to identify your triggers:

***What type of situation were you in?***

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***What was happening around you?***

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***What kind of emotions were you feeling?***

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***What thoughts were you experiencing?***

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***Now list your triggers so that you can remember them:***

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***What is a good strategy for the next time you get triggered?***

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## Coping with triggers

There are a lot of techniques that therapists can use to help you cope with triggers. One way is to use your senses to connect with your environment. This can help stop a PTSD reaction.

Here are some options. Next time you are feeling triggered, try them and see what works for you:

- ▶ Take off your shoes and socks and feel the floor beneath your feet
- ▶ Massage your temples or your arms
- ▶ Describe what you see out loud
- ▶ Count all the pieces of furniture around you
- ▶ Take ten deep breaths
- ▶ List your favorite memories
- ▶ Dance or sing

It is possible to heal from trauma, but you must first understand how trauma affects you and learn techniques for coping with your triggers.



## PART 4:

# Spiritual health and self-care techniques

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Many individuals find support, meaning, community, and sense of purpose through spirituality and religion. When you are released, you might join a church, temple, or mosque. These faith-based organizations not only provide a community of support, they also have a lot of programs for individuals who need help getting back on their feet.

There are also various options for twelve step or other social-emotional groups that might be right for you. Refer to [Welcome Home: Alameda County Reentry Resource Directory](#) or talk to your probation officer or parole agent about your options.

Until you can join these kinds of groups, there are self-care techniques and mind-body exercises that you can do on your own to maintain spiritual health and psychological well-being.

## SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES

When we are stressed, our brain sends out stress hormones. Our heart rate increases, our breathing becomes shallow and quick, and our muscles tense as if we are getting ready to respond to a threat.

One way to deal with a stress response is through a relaxation technique.

Relaxation techniques come in many forms. They can involve prayer, meditation, chanting, singing, massage, writing, or exercise. You can make up your own technique or combine different ones.

Below are brief explanations of a few self-care techniques. Some of these may feel a little weird if you're not used to doing them, but give them a try. They might help you feel better.



## Mindfulness

A powerful way to pull yourself out of negative thoughts is to focus on your immediate environment. This is called mindfulness.

When you're practicing mindfulness, you bring your awareness to your immediate thoughts, feelings, and sensations. This means keeping your mind on your environment right now instead of letting it drift to the past or worrying about the future, which can get you stuck in a cycle of negative thinking. You allow your thoughts and feelings to come and go without trying to understand them, respond to them, or judge them. This means looking at things without labeling them as 'good' or 'bad'.

— “ —

*Every moment is a  
fresh beginning.*

*- T.S. Eliot*

— ” —

## Practicing Mindfulness

1. Stop what you are doing and smell the air. Listen to the sounds in your surroundings. Notice the colors of objects in the room.
2. Now, focus on how your body feels. Is your neck stiff? Do your leg muscles feel tight?
3. Your mind may drift to what happened in the past or thoughts of what is to come or what you need to do. You may find yourself using a critical or judgmental internal voice.
4. Notice the thoughts. Notice the sensations that this critical inner voice left in your body.
5. Now let the thoughts go.
6. Return your attention to the present moment. Take a deep breath and pay attention to how it feels in your body.

“

*Today is a gift – that is why it is called the present.*

”

If your mind is accustomed to wandering, it might take some time to slow it down or bring it to the present. Keep at it. Every time you find your mind drifting away from the present moment, gently bring it back. If you spend a little bit of time on it each day, over time you can train your mind to drift less into negative thoughts and live in the present moment.



## Breathing exercises

When we are feeling anxious, we tend to breathe fast and shallowly from our upper lungs. Slow, deep breathing from the diaphragm (the muscle behind your abdomen) will lower your blood pressure and relax your muscles.

Try this breathing and relaxation exercise:



1. Sit or lay in a comfortable position
2. Close your eyes. Try to clear your mind or think of calming images – a grassy field, a sky with puffy clouds. Or you can keep your eyes open and focus on a single object in the room.
3. Take deep, slow breaths through your nose as you count to five, then exhale slowly from your mouth as you count to five again. Breathe in good energy with each inhale and release any uncomfortable emotions or thoughts with each exhale.
4. As you are breathing, you can also do a mental scan of your body to see if you are holding tension anywhere. Focus on one muscle group at a time, and as you breathe in, tense that muscle group for five seconds. Then, as you exhale slowly, release that muscle and let the tension flow out of you as you relax.
5. Repeat this process until you have moved through your entire body.
6. Spend a few minutes enjoying your state of relaxation.

For more instructions on how to use breathing techniques to increase your feeling of calm and wellbeing, you can read the *Exploring Your Breath* guide at the back of this workbook.

“  
*We can never obtain  
peace in the outer  
world until we make  
peace with ourselves.*

- Dalai Lama

”





## Meditation

Meditation is a technique in which you train your attention and awareness so that you can achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm state. It is an ancient practice that exists in many cultures.

Meditating can have a lot of benefits to your mental and physical health.

- ▶ It increases dopamine in the brain, improving mood and immune function.
- ▶ It improves the quality of sleep.
- ▶ It can improve learning, thinking, memory, attention, and concentration.
- ▶ It can help you reconnect to yourself physically and spiritually. This is especially helpful if addiction or mental health issues have stopped you from being connected to your body and mind in a healthy way.

Learning to meditate is just about clearing your mind and trying not to think of anything. You do not have to be strict about meditation or worry about doing it correctly to get the benefits.

You can meditate anywhere. Some people choose to meditate when they wake up, before they go to sleep, or while waiting for appointments.

At first, it can be difficult to sit still and try to release your thoughts, but with practice, it gets easier.



## 5-minute meditation

1. Sit in a relaxed position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Take a few deep breaths in and out
4. Acknowledge the thoughts in your mind, then let them go. Visualize them leaving your mind and flowing away as you exhale.
5. Visualize a blue sky, a calming color, or a white piece of paper.
6. When you fidget and find your mind wandering, gently push your thoughts out of your mind and bring your focus back to your breath.
7. Do not judge yourself. Thank yourself for trying.

Try the steps for the 5-minute meditation.

***How do you feel?***

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***Did it relax your body?***

Yes  No

***Do you feel calmer?***

Yes  No

***Is it something you could do when you feel stressed?***

Yes  No

If it helped you, there are meditation apps you can download onto a smartphone when you are released. These can help guide you through a variety of types of meditation and relaxation techniques. For more information and instructions, check out the *How to Meditate* guide in the back of this workbook.

## Leisure activities and social support

Leisure activities such as sports, games, playing music, reading a book, watching a movie, or talking with someone can help reduce feelings of stress or depression. They distract you from negative thoughts. They help you to connect to other people and build social support. They give you pleasure, which sends dopamine to the brain.

If you are feeling depressed, try to do something fun to take your mind off your thoughts.



The Alameda County Probation Department is a primary sponsor of the Oakland Midnight Basketball League. Learn more at [www.oaklandmidnightbasketball.com](http://www.oaklandmidnightbasketball.com)

## Nature

Research shows that spending time in nature can lower stress and anxiety and help with depression. A hike in the hills or a walk on the beach can be very soothing for the mind.

But you don't have to be in nature to get the benefits. Calming nature sounds and images of nature have been found to lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels. Put up a picture on your wall and imagine yourself there. You can tear out the full-page images in this workbook and use them as posters!

Which of these self-care techniques are you most likely to use? Check all that apply.

- Mindfulness
- Breathing techniques
- Journaling
- Relaxation techniques
- Meditation
- Leisure activities
- Nature



Tear along dashed line



Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, Oakland



# PART 5:

## Physical Health and Nutrition

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When your body is healthy, your quality of life is better.

It feels good to be strong, to have energy, and to be able to move your body easily. All these things are necessary for getting things done when you are released.

How can you make sure your body is healthy?

A healthy body needs good nutrition, regular medical checkups, and exercise.

“

*Good food nourishes and sustains the body— and does more than that. What we cook and eat affirms who we are as individuals and connects us to people, places, and cultures.*

*- Eating Behind Bars: Ending the Hidden Punishment of Food in Prison, Impact Justice, 2020.*

”



## NUTRITION

Nutritious food gives you energy for physical activity, prevents you from getting sick or gaining an unhealthy amount of weight, and protects you from diseases.

Nutritious food is also important for your mind.

Scientists have found that eating a healthy diet promotes the growth of good gut bacteria, which can lower anxiety and improve mood, concentration, and motivation.

## What we eat is a reflection of how we feel about ourselves.

While the right food can have lots of benefits for your health, eating too much of the wrong food can damage your body.

Unfortunately, the food available in prisons and jails is often low quality, highly processed, and lacking in nutrients. This makes it hard for you to get the nourishment you need to stay physically and mentally healthy while you are in prison or jail.

The good news is that when you are released, you can take back control over what you eat.

### What is a healthy diet?

A healthy, balanced diet has lots of fiber, a variety of fruits and vegetables, and healthy fats and proteins.

EAT MORE OF	EAT LESS OF
<i>Whole grains like whole wheat, cornmeal, barley, quinoa, oats, and brown rice</i>	<i>Refined grains like white bread, and white rice</i>
<i>Fruits and vegetables</i>	<i>Fried foods</i>
<i>Healthy fats like olive oil, fish oil, avocados, and sunflower oil</i>	<i>Trans fats</i>
<i>Lean proteins like fish, meat, and chicken</i>	<i>Animal fats like butter or lard</i>
<i>Starches like potatoes and yams</i>	<i>Sugar, especially corn syrup</i>
<i>Nuts and legumes like lentils, chickpeas, beans, soybeans</i>	<i>Artificial flavors and preservatives</i>
<i>Fermented foods like unsweetened yogurt</i>	<i>High sodium (salt) foods</i>
<i>Foods flavored with herbs and seasonings</i>	<i>Fast food</i>
<i>Home-cooked food</i>	<i>Soda and sugary drinks</i>
<i>Fresh fruit juices</i>	

Nutrition experts designed the Healthy Eating Plate to guide you in making good eating choices.

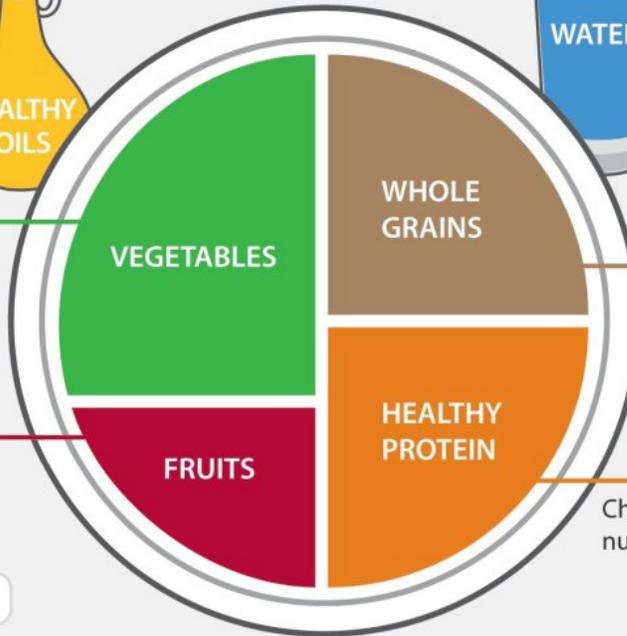
# HEALTHY EATING PLATE



Use healthy oils (like olive and canola oil) for cooking, on salad, and at the table. Limit butter. Avoid trans fat.



Drink water, tea, or coffee (with little or no sugar). Limit milk/dairy (1-2 servings/day) and juice (1 small glass/day). Avoid sugary drinks.



The more veggies – and the greater the variety – the better. Potatoes and French fries don't count.

Eat a variety of whole grains (like whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta, and brown rice). Limit refined grains (like white rice and white bread).

Eat plenty of fruits of all colors.

Choose fish, poultry, beans, and nuts; limit red meat and cheese; avoid bacon, cold cuts, and other processed meats.



**STAY ACTIVE!**

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The Nutrition Source  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource)

Harvard Medical School  
Harvard Health Publications  
[www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)



Copyright © 2011, Harvard University. For more information about The Healthy Eating Plate, please see The Nutrition Source, Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health, [www.thenutritionsource.org](http://www.thenutritionsource.org), and Harvard Health Publications, [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu).



## Foods that help with mood

### Fish oils

Omega-3 fatty acids in fresh fish, canned fish like sardines and tuna, and fish oil supplements may be helpful in treating mild or moderate depression.

### Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 and other B vitamins play a role in producing brain chemicals that affect mood and other brain functions. Eating fish, lean meats, poultry, eggs, low-fat milk, and vitamin supplements can help get you the B12 you need.

## Affordable food

Depending on where you live, getting healthy foods can be challenging. Some neighborhoods don't have a lot of options for fresh food, and in the Bay Area, food can be expensive.

There are local organizations that help Alameda County residents get good quality and affordable food. [Welcome Home: Alameda County Reentry Resource Directory](#) has a list of food and nutrition resources such as free hot meals, free and low-cost groceries, and meal delivery for people with mobility issues.

When you are released, talk to your probation officer or parole agent about financial support for purchasing groceries.

### **CalFresh**

CalFresh is California's food stamp program. CalFresh provides households with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to purchase nutritious food at stores and farmers markets.

You do not have to be on public assistance to be eligible to receive CalFresh. If you qualify for CalFresh, you will receive benefits no later than 30 days from the date the office received your application. If you have very little or no income, you may be eligible to receive CalFresh within three days.

## Going food shopping

Here are a few tips that can help you shop for the right foods:

- ✔ **Read nutrition labels**

Read nutrition labels to check how much sodium (salt), saturated fats, trans fats, sugar, and calories you are consuming in comparison to the recommended daily value. Also, try to avoid foods that have a lot of added preservatives or artificial additives.

- ✔ **Check expiration dates**

Food that expires within a few weeks probably has fewer preservatives and is therefore healthier.

- ✔ **Shop for fresh food**

In grocery stores, fresh food is in the produce section and areas that have meat and dairy products. In general, shopping along the perimeter of the store rather than in the center aisles is the healthiest bet. The frozen section will also carry items that were packaged fresh and then frozen to preserve them. Farmers markets are a great place to shop for fresh food, and many accept CalFresh EBT payment.

- ✔ **Cook at home**

The easiest way to know what's in your food is to cook at home. That way, you choose the ingredients that go into the dish. Cooking can be a relaxing activity. It's fun to learn and a great way to share time with people you care about. There are free and low-cost cooking classes online that you can look up when you are released. You can also find recipes for almost any dish online.



## EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular exercise lowers your risk of illness and disease, keeps your body fit, and is very important for your mental health. Exercise gets more oxygen to the brain, boosts memory, and increases concentration. It lowers stress hormones and releases endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin, which improve your mood. It's like a natural anti-depressant!

You don't have to go to the gym to get the benefits of exercise. Activities like walking, hiking, and gardening are great ways to stay active.

Alameda County has lots of hiking trails. There are free outdoor exercise classes and parks with basketball and tennis courts. You can find a lot of resources in [Welcome Home: Alameda County Reentry Resource Directory](#).

Find something that you like and stick with it!



## MIND-BODY EXERCISES

Mind-body exercises combine movement, mental focus, controlled breathing, and meditation to improve overall health and well-being. Tai chi and yoga are examples of mind-body exercises that you can do in your cell.

*If you have any injuries or health conditions, make sure to check with a doctor before doing any strenuous activities.*



### Tai chi

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese exercise that combines flowing movements with deep breathing. This is intended to bring a person to a place of mental quietness and peace. Anyone can practice tai chi, regardless of age or fitness level. Tai chi has lots of health benefits:

- ▶ Improved mood
- ▶ Reduced stress
- ▶ Improved flexibility, strength, and agility
- ▶ Decreased stress, anxiety, and depression
- ▶ A clearer mind and better concentration

## Yoga

Yoga is a physical and spiritual practice that originated in ancient India. It is very popular in the United States. Millions of Americans of every race and background, from young children to seniors, practice yoga.

There are a lot of yoga styles. Most of them are a series of poses that go along with breathing exercises.

For many people, it's a meditative practice that makes them feel connected to the world in a spiritual way. Yoga also has many health benefits:

- ▶ Improved posture, balance, and muscle tone
- ▶ Reduced stress and improved mood
- ▶ A clear mind

Many professional athletes use yoga in their training to increase flexibility, improve strength and endurance, guard against injury, and strengthen their minds. But you don't have to be an athlete to get the benefits of yoga. Every yoga pose can be modified to fit different ability levels. It's about what you are capable of, what you need, and what you want to get out of it.



If the idea of yoga is too new, strange, or daunting for you, don't worry! You can get the same benefits by doing gentle stretches and strength building exercises along with a period of rest to quiet the mind.

If you want to try yoga, check out the guides in the back of this workbook.

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

An STD is a disease that spreads from person to person during sex. STDs can be caused by bacteria, parasites, and viruses. Some are curable while others will be with you for life.

People can look completely fine but still have an STD. You should assume that everyone you have sex with might have an STD and take precautions so that you don't get one. One of the best ways to do this is to wear a condom during sex.

### Condom Rules

<p><b>DO</b> use a condom every time you have sex.</p> 	<p><b>DO</b> read the package and check the expiration date.</p> 	<p><b>DO</b> make sure there are no tears or defects.</p> 	<p><b>DO</b> store condoms in a cool, dry place.</p> 	<p><b>DO</b> use latex or polyurethane condoms.</p> 	<p><b>DO</b> use water-based or silicone-based lubricant to prevent breakage.</p> 
<p><b>DON'T</b> store condoms in your wallet as heat and friction can damage them.</p> 	<p><b>DON'T</b> use nonoxynol-9 (a spermicide), as this can cause irritation.</p> 	<p><b>DON'T</b> use oil-based products like baby oil, lotion, petroleum jelly, or cooking oil because they will cause the condom to break.</p> 	<p><b>DON'T</b> use more than one condom at a time.</p> 	<p><b>DON'T</b> reuse a condom.</p> 	

Adapted from a graphic from the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020.

What you can do to lower your risk for getting STDs:

- ✔ Have sex only with people who have been tested for STDs.
- ✔ Have sex with fewer people.
- ✔ Talk to your partner about the importance of using condoms before you have sex.
- ✔ Use a new latex or polyurethane condom correctly for every act of vaginal or anal sex throughout the entire sex act.
- ✔ Use a new latex or polyurethane dental dam when you perform oral sex to provide a barrier between your mouth and your partner's genitals or anus.
- ✔ Get tested for STDs, including HIV, regularly.
- ✔ Limit or eliminate drug and alcohol use before and during sex.
- ✔ Ask your doctor if either pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a good option for you to prevent HIV infection.



## PART 6:

# Drug and alcohol dependency

When times are hard, it can be tempting to use alcohol or drugs to turn off your mind and numb your feelings. Some people use recreational drugs or alcohol to cope with untreated mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Even though they may make you feel good for a short time, drugs and alcohol can be very damaging to your physical and mental health. Abusing drugs and alcohol can lead to chronic diseases. It can damage your internal organs. It can lead to overdose and death.

The abuse of prescription opioids and heroin has become a major public health issue in the United States and the world. Opioid abuse claims more lives each year than motor vehicle crashes.

Drug and alcohol use can also damage your relationships at work and home. It can make you unreliable, forgetful, tired, or irritable. It can make you more likely to have conflict with friends, family, or coworkers.

“

*I went into prison with 2 years, then I got caught with drugs and I got 25 years to life. I struck out. After that, I was still hard-headed and I caught another case.*

*They sent me to maximum security. When I got down there, it finally clicked.*

*Something registered in my mind. I got into the substance abuse program, and I completed it, and it changed my thinking patterns. It changed my view of prison. People really care about you, even though you think people don't care about you. Drugs are not the way – that's not it.*

- MJ

Served 17 years in prison;  
paroled in 2019.

”

***Alcohol is legal to use for anyone over 21 years old. Marijuana is now legal in California for those 18 and older, but that does not mean that you should use it.***

Marijuana and alcohol are substances that cloud your judgement, making you more likely to make bad choices. Even a little bit might put you in a dangerous position. The reentry process is challenging enough. So, play it safe!

If you have had an addiction in the past, or if your use of drugs and alcohol have caused problems in your life, then you will need to take extra precautions during the reentry process. Start thinking about how to avoid environments or people that might tempt you to use. It can be a simple message to friends or family members that you can't see them in situations where drugs or alcohol are present. Finding a sober living environment is also an option that might be right for you.

If you have the opportunity for a pre-release video call with your probation officer, you can talk to them about the various resources and treatment options available to you.

***Recognizing that alcohol or substance use has been a problem in your life is not easy, but making arrangements early to avoid temptations is the best thing you can do for yourself.***



## ADDICTION

Being caught in the grip of addiction can be frightening, confusing, and lonely.

Getting help from professionals who have experience dealing with addiction is the most effective way of taking back control over your life. Many drug and alcohol treatment counselors overcame addiction themselves. They understand what you are going through.

Treatment for drug or alcohol dependency deals with both the mental and physical aspects of addiction. The physical aspect is when your body feels terrible when the substance is taken away. This is called withdrawal.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Shaky hands
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Nausea and/or vomiting
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Sweating
- ▶ Confusion
- ▶ Hallucinations
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Racing heart
- ▶ Seizures

### Dealing with opioid overdose

Naloxone (also known as Narcan®) is a medication used to counter the effects of opioid overdose. It is injected or sprayed into the nose and can be administered by anyone. If used quickly enough, it can save a life.

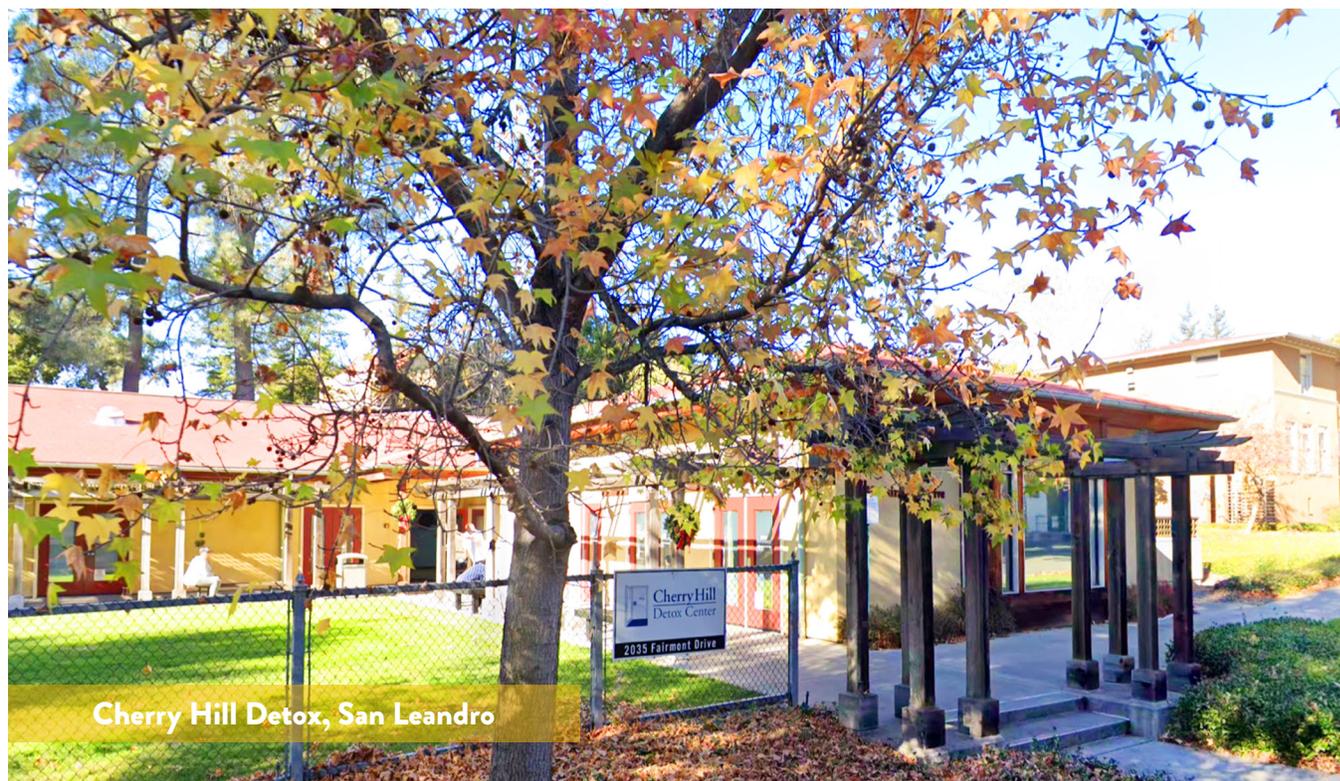
Many places in California now have Naloxone kits available. The Harm Reduction Coalition website has step-by-step instructions on how to administer Naloxone:

[www.harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/responding-to-opioid-overdose](http://www.harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/responding-to-opioid-overdose)

The psychological aspect of addiction is when you have an emotional or mental attachment to drugs or alcohol. Perhaps it has become a part of your everyday routine and social life. You crave it and seek it out all the time, and when you can't get it, you act out emotionally.

## DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT PROGRAMS

There are different kinds of treatment programs to choose from. You can choose a live-in treatment program or an out-patient program, where you live at home but receive services during the day at a facility. Therapy for addiction can also take place in support groups, sober-living communities, and individual therapy sessions.

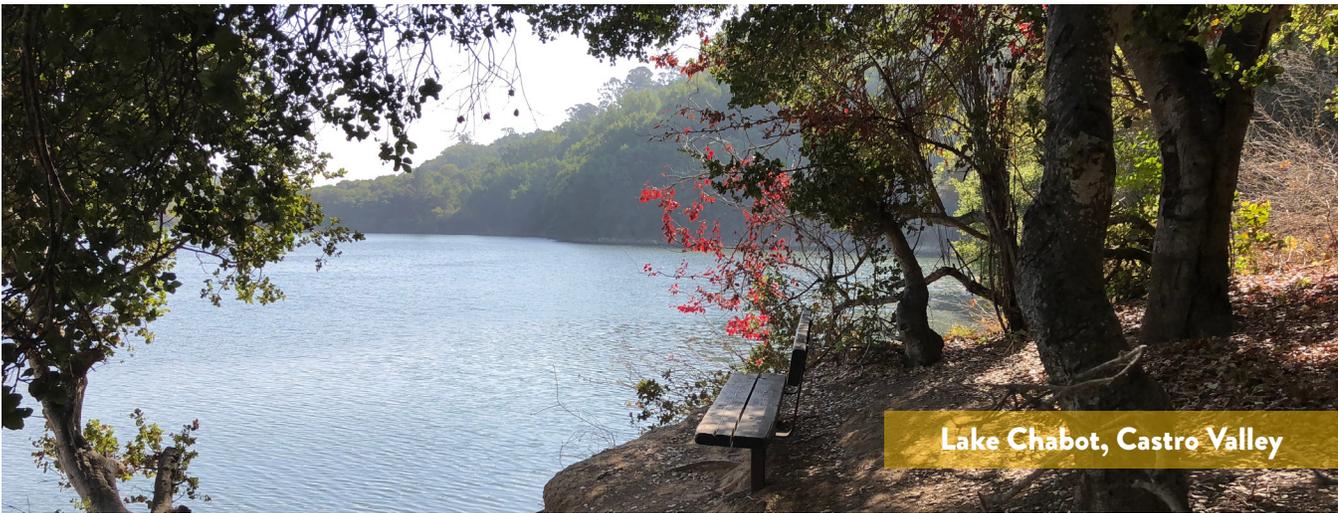


Some treatment programs start with detox, which is when the body clears itself of the addictive substances under the care of medical staff. During detox, you may be given medications to help ease the symptoms of withdrawal.

For some opioid or heroin users, there is the option to begin a medication assisted treatment (MAT) program. Methadone or buprenorphine are prescribed to help your body deal with not having opioids or heroin.

Once the physical aspects of withdrawal have been addressed, you can start dealing with the psychological, emotional, and behavioral factors that caused your dependence.

A drug and alcohol treatment counselor will work with you to explore what contributed to your addiction and help you come up with ways to manage situations that could cause a relapse.



Regardless of the treatment program you choose, you should be the key driver of your treatment process. Effective treatment should:

- ✔ Be tailored to your individual needs.
- ✔ Address underlying issues that have led to your substance use.
- ✔ Be provided for a period that is long enough for you to recover from your addiction.
- ✔ Offer you a chance to build a community of support.
- ✔ Respect and value your culture.

You have a lot of options. Your probation officer can help you find the right treatment program for you.

## RECOVERY AND RELAPSE

Recovery from addiction is a process that involves setting goals and working with a support network to get well. Recovery begins with a stable and safe place to live and a supportive community of family, friends, or coworkers. It requires living a life with purpose and independence.

Everyone's path to recovery is different, and relapses are a natural part of recovery.

***Learning how to recover from setbacks is an important part of learning how to live with an addiction.***

***Have you had an addiction in the past?***

Yes

No

***When did you start using?***

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***How did it affect your life?***

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***How did you handle it?***

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Berkeley Pier

## PART 7:

# Your health and well-being plan

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A personal health plan will help you stay healthy so you can confront the reentry process with the best chance of success.

Complete the worksheets on the next few pages as you start thinking about what you want to accomplish with your health. You can tear out the worksheets and share them with your probation officer and support network.

First, some guidance about planning:

- ✔ Be specific about what you want to accomplish.
- ✔ Make sure your goals are realistic.
- ✔ List the action steps that are necessary for you to achieve your goals.
- ✔ List the resources that you may need to complete your action steps.
- ✔ Think about the challenges you might face along the way.
- ✔ Plan ahead about how to address these challenges.
- ✔ Give yourself a timeline for completing your goals.
- ✔ Acknowledge your small accomplishments along the way.
- ✔ Don't give up.

When you return to Alameda County, you will have support to find medical care, fitness activities, healthy and affordable food, and drug and alcohol treatment if you need it.

***Involve friends and family in your planning so they can be there to help if you have setbacks. Ask for help early and often!***

Getting and staying healthy is hard, but it's not harder than suffering from illness, disease, or mental illness. By making sure you have a healthy body and mind, you are laying the foundation for your success after release.



## HEALTH & WELL-BEING WORKSHEET

If you don't know your expected completion date yet, you can leave it blank for now. Use the worksheets on the next few pages to identify health and wellness goals for yourself. For each goal, list steps that you need to take to achieve the goal, when you expect to finish each step, support you will need along the way, challenges you may encounter, and how you might deal with challenges.

The table below provides an example of a completed worksheet.

**EXAMPLE**

<b>GOAL: Manage my diabetes</b>				
<b>Action steps</b>	<b>Expected completion date</b>	<b>Supports needed</b>	<b>Potential challenges</b>	<b>How will you deal with these challenges?</b>
<i>Make sure I have enough meds when I'm released</i>	<i>Before release</i>	<i>Medical staff in my facility</i>	<i>Maybe they won't give me extra meds</i>	<i>Find out what my options are after release</i>
<i>Make a doctor's appointment</i>	<i>One week after release</i>	<i>Directory of doctor's offices</i>	<i>I don't have health insurance</i>	<i>Talk to my probation officer about enrolling in Medi-Cal</i>
<i>Lose 10 pounds</i>	<i>Four months after release</i>	<i>Healthy food and exercise class</i>	<i>Cost of healthy food and fitness classes</i>	<i>Find food assistance and free exercise options</i>

**GOAL 1:**

<b>Action step</b>	<b>Expected completion date</b>	<b>Supports needed</b>	<b>Potential challenges</b>	<b>How will you deal with these challenges?</b>

<b>GOAL 2:</b>					
<b>Action step</b>	<b>Expected completion date</b>	<b>Supports needed</b>	<b>Potential challenges</b>	<b>How will you deal with these challenges?</b>	

**GOAL 3:**

Action step	Expected completion date	Supports needed	Potential challenges	How will you deal with these challenges?

**GOAL 4:**

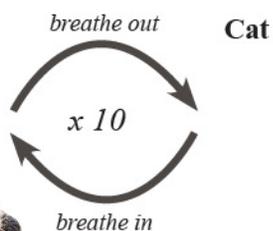
<b>Action step</b>	<b>Expected completion date</b>	<b>Supports needed</b>	<b>Potential challenges</b>	<b>How will you deal with these challenges?</b>

## Yoga Every Day

**Y**oga can help you feel better, reducing pain and stiffness and helping you sleep. It can also make you feel calmer and happier, and put you in touch with your true self.

Many people practise first thing in the morning because yoga can help you have the best possible day. Things may still occur that you'd rather not have happen, but you'll be in a better place to respond with your own wisdom and creativity. Try this routine every day for a week, and let us know how you get on.

### 1. Cow



### Cat



### 2. Down Dog

Five breaths



### 3. Warrior 2

Five breaths each side



### 4. Triangle

Five breaths each side

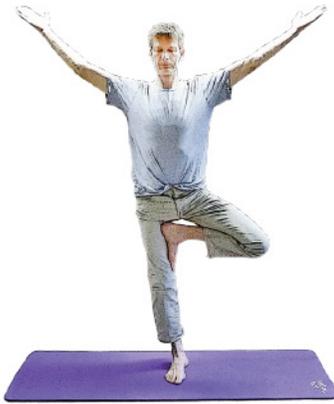


### 5. Forward Fold

Five slow breaths. Bend your knees if it's more comfortable.



- 6. Tree**  
Five breaths each side



- 7. Seated Twist**  
Five breaths each side



- 8. Boat**  
Build up to five breaths



- 9. Bridge**



Lie on your back with your feet close to your bum then push your hips up. Stay for three breaths, then carefully lower yourself down. Repeat another two times.

- 10. Rest**



Lie like this for a few minutes, letting your body settle after all the good work it has done.

- 11. Sitting**



Sit upright, either on a pillow or on a chair or the edge of your bed. Focus on the smoothness and feel of your natural breath, and count each breath. Count to ten breaths, on the out-breath, and then start again. Don't worry if you lose count. Just start again at one. Do this for five minutes, gently bringing your attention back to your breath if it wanders off. Over time you may wish to build up to 25 minutes

# Chair Yoga for Every Body

**T**here are a variety of yoga styles to suit every body, all ages and fitness levels. You can even do yoga while staying in your chair. Below is a routine that works for anyone, regardless of your age, and can easily be done in your cell.

**Starting position:** Sit towards the front edge of the chair or bed, with your feet on the floor hip distance apart, toes facing forward. Sit up straight, with your spine away from the back of the chair. Rest your hands on your legs. Take a breath, growing slightly taller. Look straight ahead.



## 1. Warm up

Raise your arms as you breathe in through your nose. Lower your arms, and sigh out through your mouth. Do this five times, synchronising the movement to your breath.



## 2. Seated Cat

Hold the seat and straighten your arms. Breathe in and squeeze your shoulder blades together, lifting your chest and looking up. Breathe out and round your back, your shoulders forward, chin to chest and looking down. Repeat these moves four more times while taking slow, even breaths.



## 3. Side Stretch

Breathe in, raising your right arm, and breathe out, stretching to the left. Hold the position for five breaths. Repeat on the other side for five breaths.



## 4. Neck Releases

**A:** Breathe out, and turn slowly to look over your left shoulder. Breathe in, returning the head to centre. Breathe out, and turn slowly to look over your right shoulder. Breathe in, returning the head to centre. Repeat four more times.

**B:** Breathe out, and tuck your chin slowly towards the chest. Breathe in, returning your head to centre. Breathe out, looking up. Breathe in, returning the head to centre. Repeat four more times.

**C:** Breathe out, tilting your right ear slowly towards your right shoulder. Breathe in and return your head to centre. Breathe out and tilt your left ear gently towards your left shoulder. Breathe in and return your head to centre. Repeat four more times.



### 5. Seated Eagle

Cross your right leg over the left. Raise your arms out to the sides. Bend the elbows and bring your palms and forearms together in front of you. Lift the elbows and relax the shoulders. Hold for five breaths. Repeat on the other side.



### 6. Seated Pigeon

Place your right ankle on your leg, above or below your left knee. Let your knee relax out to the side while keeping the foot flexed. Don't push or force the knee down. Take five easy breaths, then repeat on the left side.



### 7. Seated Twist

Have your legs hip distance apart, toes facing forward. Place your right hand on the back of the seat, breathe in and sit up straight. As you breathe out turn your upper body to the right and place your left hand on the outer right leg. Take five breaths here. Return to face forward on an in-breath. Repeat on the left.



### 8. Forward Bend

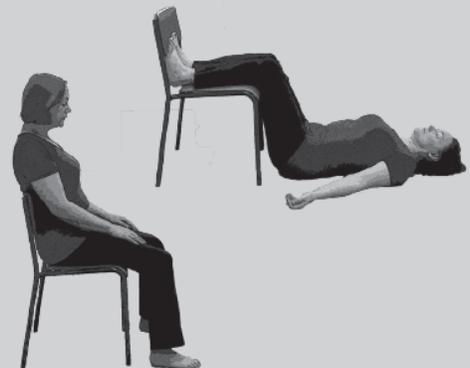
Forward bends have a calming effect on the mind and body. Start with your hands resting on top of your thighs. Breathe in and sit up taller. Breathe out, fold forward, gradually sliding your hands down your legs. Let your body rest on your legs, allowing your head and neck to relax. Take seven breaths here, and come back up slowly on an in-breath.



### 9. Relaxation

Sit back in your chair, take three sighing breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Now close your eyes, and rest your hands in your lap, feeling your body supported by the chair. Let your attention be with your natural breath and rest for 3 minutes or 30 breaths.

If you prefer you can also rest with your back on the floor and your legs up on the chair. Many people find this comfortable and refreshing for the legs. Follow your body and your breath and you will find the perfect way to relax.



# How to Meditate

**Y**ou might have heard about meditation and its benefits. Most people who meditate say they sleep better, and worry less. Others say that their thinking isn't such a problem anymore and that they're not as depressed. Some people experience a radical shift in how they see themselves, and the world, where everyday events around them are much the same as ever, but they themselves have learned to let go a little (or a lot).

With all these good things that can come from meditating, many people mean to take up meditation, but it can be hard to get started, especially on your own. This is why we put this piece together, and why we offer to write to people in prison about their meditation.

*“For me meditation means just quietening down, just stopping that chattering monkey, all that garbage that’s going on in your head. A thought’ll pop up, but you don’t have to go with it. And it’s not just a thought that pops up – something happens, you don’t have to react to it, deal with it. Someone swears at you or pushes in front of you in the queue, you don’t have to react to it. It’s a case of not letting other people dictate your actions. Not letting an impulse dictate what you do. Trying to be the person you want to be.”*

~ J, HMP Stanford Hill

## Arranging Your Body

If you can find the right sitting position – comfortable, stable and upright – you are well on the way to getting the hang of meditation. Take ten minutes or so to experiment with the positions in the pictures. Once you’ve found a position, make sure your back is upright and truly relaxed. Sit on at least four inches of support; if you try to sit directly on the floor with nothing under you, some of your back muscles will start to ache as they work unnecessarily to keep you from falling backwards or slumping. So sit on a couple of thick books, a folded pillow or anything you can find. That way, the backbones can stack up correctly, allowing the back muscles to be relaxed.

- Keep your neck long, with the chin not pointing up or down.
- Keep your eyes open, gazing down past your nose, to a spot on the floor in front of you.



### Half Lotus

Easier than full lotus. Pull your right foot in close to your body and then place your left foot on your right thigh. Switch sides each time you sit.



### Burmese

A way of sitting with both legs bent and parallel in front of you, both ankles on the floor.

### Full Lotus

Might be difficult at first, but it's a good, stable position. Put your right foot on your left thigh, then your left foot on your right thigh. Switch sides each time you sit.





### Seiza

Kneel with two cushions or a thick rolled up blanket between your bum and your feet.

### Chair

It's also absolutely fine to sit on a chair, or on the edge of your bed. Sit up straight towards the front of the seat; don't lean on the back. Have your feet firmly planted on the floor (prop them up if they don't reach the floor).



### Attention with the Breath

Take three deep long breaths then start to breathe normally in and out through the nose. Count the breaths silently to yourself: in 1, out 2, in 3, out 4 and so on, up to 10, and then start from 1 again. If you lose count, it doesn't matter. Just come back to 1 and keep going.

Keep going like this for five minutes to begin with. That's all there is to the practice. It is as simple as that! As you are counting your breaths, some thinking may be going on in your mind, and it is tempting to follow your thoughts. This happens to us all. It is what minds do. They wander and think and worry and plan. That's fine. It is also possible for the mind to be still and focussed. This is also what minds do. And actually, you'll find that your mind really enjoys being stiller. So when your attention wanders off from the breath, don't worry. Just let it return very gently without any thought, back to the breath. You might have to do a lot of this returning. That too is normal. Keep with it, without judging yourself.

### How Much and When?

Meditation works when it's practised every day. Some prisoners tell us that they meditate for several hours each day. Others might do five minutes in the morning when they wake up, and five before they go to sleep. If you can manage to work up to 25 minutes, that's good.

Final tip: See if you can let go of trying to get anywhere with meditation. Don't try to do anything. Keep returning your attention to your breath when it wanders, and know that the time and energy you put in will lead somewhere, but don't try to be anything other than exactly how you are. We'd love to know how you're doing.

### An Invitation to Sit with Us

Staff at the Prison Phoenix Trust sit in meditation each morning from 8.30 to 8.55. You are welcome to join us then if you can, wherever you are. We may not be together, but in fact we are never be separate. (Regular sitting makes that clearer J!) And if 8.30 isn't a good time for you, it doesn't matter: any time you do it is time well spent.

# Yoga Toolkit

**Y**oga encompasses a variety of practices – it becomes more than a form of exercise for many people.

Yoga is:

- A strength practice because it uses body weight as resistance.
- A flexibility practice because it mobilises joints and improves your range of motion.
- An energising practice because it helps to expand your lung capacity using breath awareness.
- A calming practice because the relaxation exercises help you manage stress.

When combined with a regular meditation practise, these techniques can become a toolkit for negotiating daily life. You'll probably notice the physical benefits first. But yoga doesn't stop there, because the physical benefits over time expand into your emotional and mental landscape. Strength in the body translates to a mental resilience. The flexibility in the muscles and joints translates into a more adaptable approach to life. As you learn to transform energy with breathing and relaxation, you can control and change your moods.

As you work today, be curious rather than critical. Focus on enjoying the journey. Listen to your body. Modify or opt out of anything that doesn't suit you. Think of these exercises as tools in your toolkit – you will know the best ones to use today.

## 1. Mountain Stretches



Flow between these two. Repeat five times with the breath.

## 2. Hip Circles



Gently circle your hips clockwise five times, then back the other way.

## 3. Tree in the Wind



Breathe out, stretching to the left. Breathe in and return to the centre. Then breathe out and lean to the right. Flow with the breath five times each side.

## 4. Moving Warrior



Flow between these two, bending your knee and lifting your arms. Try this five times with the breath then repeat five times on the other side.

## 5. Forward Bend



Relax here for five breaths.

## 6. Garland



5 breaths.

## 7a. Lunge



5 breaths, then move into...

### 7b. Lunge Twist



5 breaths and then repeat 7a and 7b on the other side.

### 8. Puppy Dog



5 breaths.

### 9. Threading the Needle



5 breaths each side.

### 10. Reclining Twist



5 breaths each side.

### 11. Rest



30 slow, deep breaths. Let your body relax.

### 12. Sitting



Sit upright, either on a pillow or on a chair or the edge of your bed. Focus on the smoothness and feel of your natural breath, and count each breath. Count ten breaths, on the out-breath, and then start again. Don't worry if you lose count. Just start again at one. Do this for five minutes, gently bringing your attention back to your breath if it wanders off, which is normal. Over time you may wish to build up to 25 minutes.

# Exploring Your Breath

**D**epending on whether you exercise or not, today you will breathe in and out between 17,000 and 28,000 times. Every breath is new and unique. Amazing! As you read this, can you notice your breathing? What does it feel like right now?

Breathing is a vital natural process providing healthy clean air to energise our bodies. When we breathe well, we're more likely to feel well. For example, consciously breathing in a relaxed rhythm will help make your body feel more relaxed. In yoga, certain ways of breathing can help you feel more connected to yourself and your life, as well as to all existence.

In the three-part breath you breathe in slowly and deeply as you visualise (and feel) your lungs filling from bottom to top - first by expanding the abdomen, or belly, then the middle rib cage, and finally the upper chest. When you breathe out, you visualise (and feel) the breath emptying in reverse, from top to bottom, gently pulling in the abdomen slightly at the end to empty the lungs completely. Try it like this:

- 1. Put your hands on your belly and breathe in deeply and slowly.** Feel the hands moving outwards as you breathe in, and relaxing inwards as you breathe out. Feel your belly moving for five breaths.
- 2. Now put your hands on your middle rib cage.** When you breathe in, be aware of your belly expanding as before, and feel the rib cage expanding after the belly has expanded. When you breathe out, feel the rib cage relaxing, and then sense the belly relaxing. Keep your hands in this middle position for five breaths.
- 3. Finally, put your hands with the finger tips resting on your collar bones.** As you breathe in, be aware of the belly expanding, then the middle part of your chest, and finally, the upper part of your lungs, underneath your hands, will fill with air. This is harder to feel, so if you can't, don't worry: just be aware and visualise the lungs filling in this area. Breathe out and feel the emptying in reverse: upper chest, middle chest and belly. Do this for five breaths.
- 4. Now rest your hands on your lap, and continue in the same way.** Feel the whole in-breath coming in, rolling like a wave up the body: belly, mid-chest, upper chest - and rolling out again in reverse. Sit and do this for five minutes.

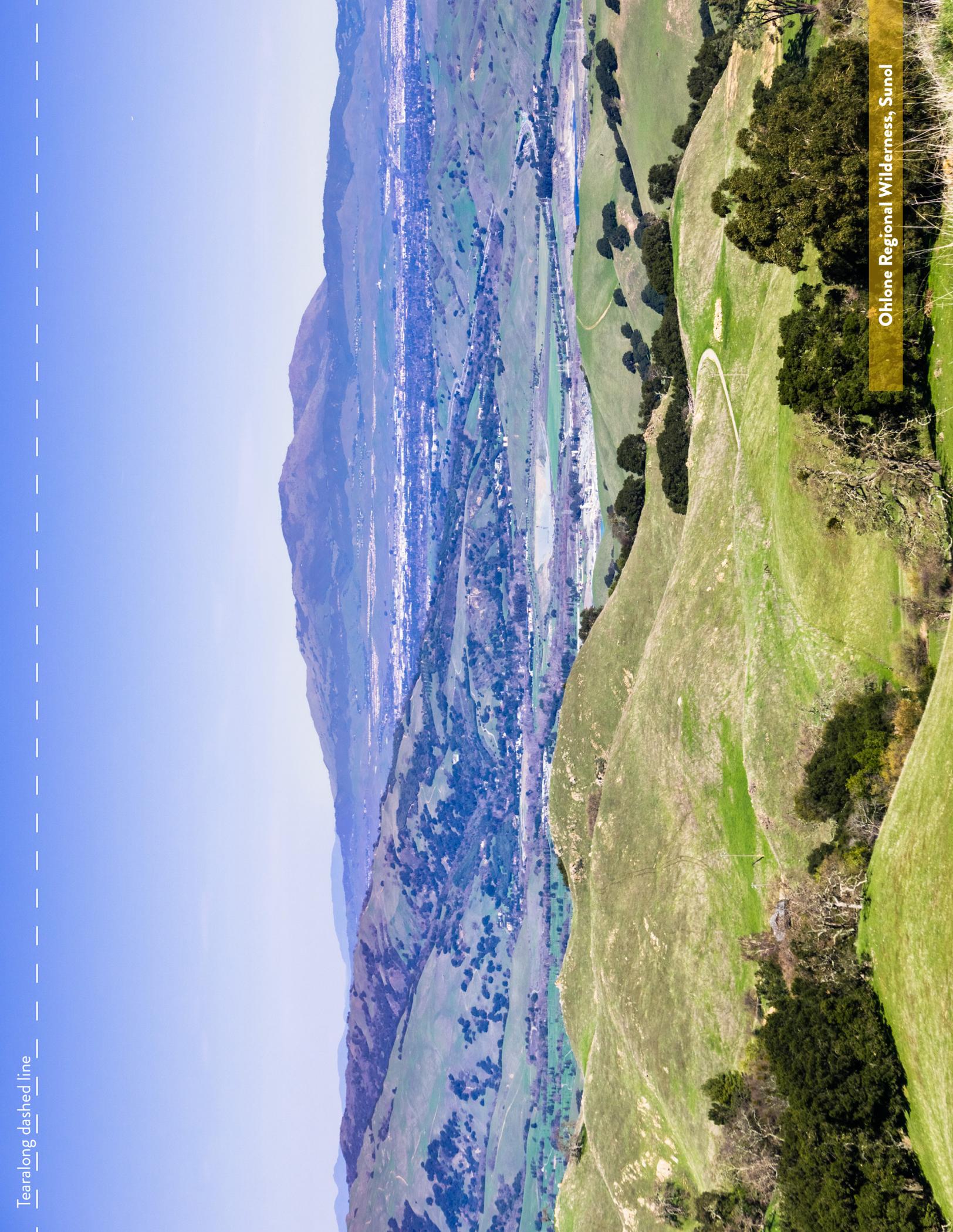


While this is called the three-part breath, it's really just one continuous activity: breath, body and attention all at one with each other. Let us know how you get on with this. We'd love to hear from you!

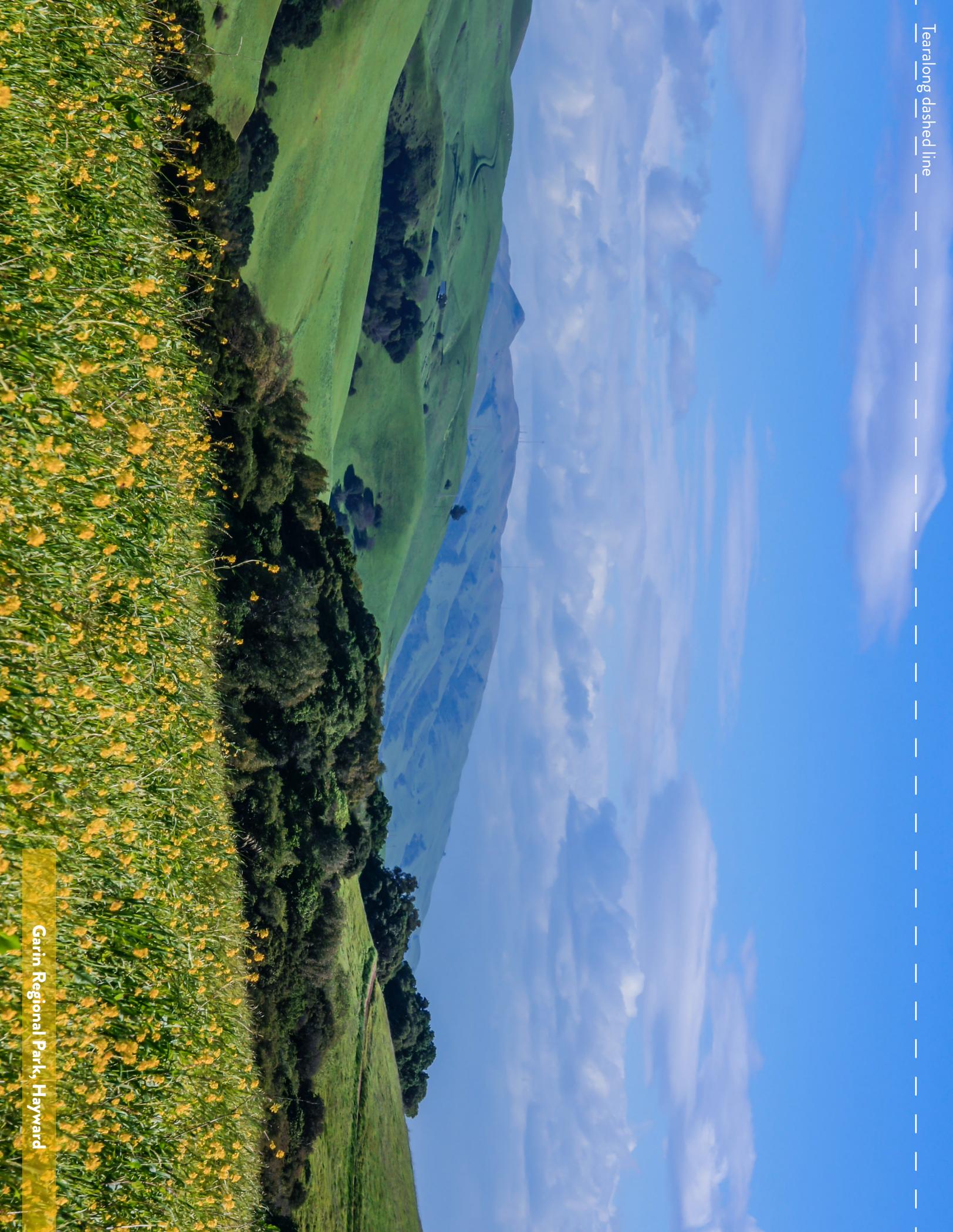
**“We must welcome the future, remembering that soon it will be the past; and we must respect the past, remembering that it was once all that was humanly possible.”**

*~ George Santayana, philosopher and poet, 1863 - 1952*

Tear along dashed line



Ohlone Regional Wilderness, Sunol







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