

What is mindfulness and how can it help me?



Mindfulness is a type of relaxation and stress management technique that could help improve your psychological wellbeing.¹ It is the ability to be fully present, aware of where you are and what you are doing, and not being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around you.²

Mindfulness is all about getting your senses involved. Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you are being mindful.² It can be as simple as focusing on your breathing, sitting down and focusing your attention on the feeling of your feet touching the floor or focusing on what you can smell or taste in the present moment.³

5 ways to incorporate mindfulness into your day²



Set aside some time

- You don't need any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills - but you do need to set aside some time and space.



Observe the present moment as it is

- The aim of mindfulness is to pay attention to the present moment, without judgment.
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Let your judgements roll by

- When you notice judgments arise during practicing mindfulness, make a mental note of them, then let them pass.



Return to observing the present moment as it is

- Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning again and again to the present moment.



Be kind to your wandering mind

- Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognising when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.
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How can mindfulness help me?

Mindfulness could help you:^{1,4}

- Lower stress levels and feelings of worry, fear and anger
- Improve mental clarity and memory
- Focus attention and suppress distracting information
- Be more satisfied in personal relationships

How does mindfulness work?

Mindfulness has been shown to help quieten activity in the part of the brain responsible for assessing your emotional response to your environment, called the amygdala. Mindfulness, such as focused breathing and controlled movements, can help quieten the response from your amygdala, while strengthening the connection between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex (which has a role in how you act in certain situations). These neurological changes can help you to be less reactive to stress and other negative thoughts, and could help you cope better when you do experience stress.¹

Meditation

Meditation is a form of mindfulness that you may already be familiar with. Meditation is mainly around focusing on breathing and using it as an anchor to the present moment. Below are steps to help you get the most out of meditation:²





Sit comfortably

- Find a spot that gives you a solid, comfortable seat.



Notice what your legs are doing

- If you're on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. If you're on a chair, rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor.



Straighten your upper body – but don't stiffen it

- Your spine has natural curvature. Let it be there.



Notice what your arms are doing

- Rest your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs wherever it feels most natural.



Soften your gaze

- Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. You don't have to close your eyes, but many people find that this helps.



Feel your breath

- Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing, the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest.



Notice when your mind wanders from your breath

- At some point your attention will leave your breathing and wander to other places. Don't block or eliminate this thinking. When you notice your mind wandering, gently return your attention to your breathing.
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Be kind about your wandering mind

- You may find your mind wandering constantly - that's normal, too. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, practice observing them without reacting. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that's all there is. Come back to your breath over and over again, without judgment or expectation.



When you're ready, gently lift your gaze (if your eyes are closed, open them)

- Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Most people feel very relaxed at this point. Take note of your thoughts and emotions.
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References: 1. Keng S, Smoski M, Robins C. Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: A review of empirical studies. *Clin Psychol Rev.* 2011;31(6):1041-1056. 2. Mindful. Getting Started with Mindfulness. Available at: <https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/> [Accessed March 2022]. 3. Headspace. 6 ways to practise mindfulness. Available at: <https://headspace.org.au/blog/6-ways-to-practise-mindfulness/> [Accessed March 2022]. 4. American Psychological Association. What are the benefits of mindfulness. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/ce-corner> [Accessed March 2022].

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