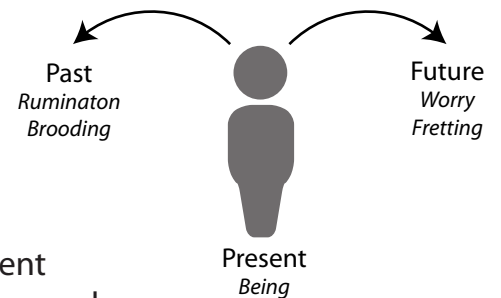


What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the short term for *mindfulness meditation practice*. This is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice. Mindfulness meditation practice is key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Why should I practice mindfulness?

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves ruminating about events that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. These habits of thought are often distressing.



Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope more effectively with a wide variety of feeling-states such as depression and anxiety, but also with physical health conditions including and chronic pain and illness.

Why do I need to practice? Can't I pay attention to the present moment already?

We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. If you haven't tried meditation before, though, you might notice that your attention wanders and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to pay attention in the present moment, but also increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate, often in unhelpful ways. People who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps their ability to stay in the present moment without being deflected.

What does it mean to 'cultivate a non-judgemental attitude'?

Shakespeare said *"there is nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so"*, and this is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy. Making judgements about our own experiences can often lead to us becoming quite distressed. For example, thoughts like *"this is horrible"* and *"I can't take any more"* are both judgements associated with distress. Practising mindfulness teaches us to accept more of our experience without judging it. This has been shown to help people live more fulfilling lives.

Some helpful quotes about mindfulness

"If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear"

- Jack Kornfield, Buddha's Little Instruction Book (1994)

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally"

- John Kabat-Zinn, Wherever You Go, There You Are (1994)

"The non-judgemental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise"

- Ruth Baer, Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice (2003)

"Keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality"

- Thich Nath Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness (1975)

"Mindfulness is simply the knack of noticing without comment whatever is happening in your present experience"

- Guy Claxton, The Heart of Buddhism (1990)

Mindfulness Exercises



Mindfulness Meditation

Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.

Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note, and allow yourself to return to your breathing.

Sometimes you might feel frustrated or bored. That's fine--these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend, or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going, and accept what's happening.

Whenever you are able to, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings, or until you are ready to be done.



Body Scan

During the body scan exercise you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice, but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body--to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again. Remember: move slowly, and just pay attention.



Mindful Eating

Choose a food you would like to practice with (preferably something you can hold in your hand without getting messy). Something as simple as a single raisin will work well. Move slowly through these steps, taking a moment to focus on each one.

Before you pick up your food, notice how it looks on the table in front of you. Notice its color, how the light reflects from its surface, and its size.

Mindfulness Exercises

Now, pick up the food. Notice the weight, and how the food feels against your skin. Roll the object between your fingers, or roll it in your hand, and notice its texture. Notice if it's smooth, rough, slick, soft, firm or if it has any other properties. Hold the food to your nose, and pay attention to its smell.

Next, place the food in your mouth, on your tongue, but don't eat it. Notice how it feels in your mouth. Does the texture feel the same as on your hand? What do you taste? Roll the food around in your mouth and pay attention to the feeling.

Finally, begin to slowly chew your food. Notice how your teeth sink into it, and how the texture is different inside. Pay close attention to the flavor, and how it spreads across your tongue. Notice how your body changes—does your mouth fill with saliva? Does your tongue feel hot or cold? Continue to chew your food, paying close attention to the many sensations as you finish.



Five Senses

Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

What are 5 things you can see? Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of a room.

What are 4 things you can feel? Maybe you can feel the pressure of your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.

What are 3 things you can hear? Notice all the background sounds you had been filtering out, such as an air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant street.

What are 2 things you can smell? Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.

What is 1 thing you can taste? Pop a piece of gum in your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one, or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.