

## **Mindfulness Techniques**

There is more than one way to practice mindfulness, but the goal of any mindfulness technique is to achieve a state of alert, focused relaxation by deliberately paying attention to thoughts and sensations without judgment. This allows the mind to refocus on the present moment. All mindfulness techniques are a form of meditation.

**Basic mindfulness meditation** – Sit quietly and focus on your natural breathing or on a word or “mantra” that you repeat silently to yourself. Allow thoughts to come and go like clouds across a summer sky without judgment and return your focus once more on your breath or mantra.

**Body sensations** – Notice subtle body sensations such as an itch or tingling without judgment and let them too pass like clouds across a sky. The more you focus on discomfort, the worse it gets. Notice each part of your body in succession from head to toe.

**Sensory** – Notice sights, sounds, scents, tastes, and sensations on your skin from pressure, air around you or touch. Name them “sight,” “sound,” “smell,” “taste,” or “touch” without judgment and let them go like clouds.

**Emotions** – Allow emotions to be present, come and go without judgment. Practice being the observer of your emotions by steady and relaxed naming of emotions: “joy,” “anger,” “frustration.” Accept the presence of the emotions and let them go.

**Crave Wave surfing** – Cope with cravings or addictions (for substances or behaviors) by observing the cravings and allow them to pass. Notice how your body feels as the feeling enters your awareness. Replace the wish for the craving to go away with the certain knowledge and understanding that it will subside. Nothing is permanent.

## **Meditation and other practices that foster mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be cultivated through mindfulness meditation, a systematic method of focusing your attention. You can learn to meditate on your own, following instructions in books or on recordings by us or others. However, you may benefit from the support of an instructor or group to answer questions and help you stay motivated. Look for someone using meditation in a way compatible with your beliefs and goals.

If you have a medical condition, you may prefer a medically oriented program that incorporates meditation. Your physician or hospital may know

about local groups. Insurance companies increasingly cover the cost of meditation instruction.

### **Getting started on your own**

Some types of meditation primarily involve concentration—repeating a phrase or focusing on the sensation of breathing, allowing the parade of clouds of thoughts that inevitably arise in our mind to come and go.

Concentration meditation techniques, as well as other activities such as tai chi, qigong, or yoga, can induce the well-known relaxation response, which is very valuable in reducing the body's response to stress.

Mindfulness meditation builds upon concentration practices over time. Here's how it works:

- **Go with the flow.** In mindfulness meditation, once you establish concentration, you observe the flow of inner thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without getting involved with them or judging them as good or bad.
- **Pay attention.** You also become aware of external sensations such as sounds, sights, and touch that make up your moment-to-moment experience. The challenge is not to latch onto a particular idea, emotion, or sensation, or to get tied up in thinking about the past or the future. Instead you simply watch what comes and goes in your mind, and discover which mental habits produce a feeling of well-being or suffering. Then you begin to make a choice of habits that promote a greater sense of well-being
- **Stay with it.** At times, this process may not seem frustrating or not relaxing at all, but over time it provides a key to greater happiness and self-awareness as you become comfortable with a wider and wider range of your experiences.

### **Practice acceptance**

Above all, mindfulness practice involves accepting whatever arises in your awareness at each moment without judgment. It involves being kind and forgiving toward yourself which generates a practice of emanating true kindness to others.

Some tips to be mindful of:

- **Gently redirect.** If your mind wanders into planning, list-making, daydream, worry or criticism, notice where it has gone and gently redirect it to sensations in the present.
- **Try and try again.** If you miss your intended meditation session, you simply start again without judgment of your self.

By practicing accepting your experience during meditation, it becomes easier to accept whatever comes your way during your day to day experiences.

### **You may also cultivate mindfulness informally**

In addition to formal meditation, you can also grow your mindfulness informally by focusing your attention on your moment-to-moment sensations during everyday activities. This is done by choosing to single-task—doing one thing at a time and giving it your full attention. Whether you are flossing your teeth, petting the dog, or eating an apple, slow down the process and be fully present and mindful as it unfolds and involves all of your senses.

### **Mindfulness Exercises to try on your own**

If mindfulness meditation appeals to you, going to a class or listening to a meditation recording can be a good way to start. In the meantime, here are two mindfulness exercises you can experience on your own.

#### **Practicing mindfulness meditation**

This exercise allows you to experience basic mindfulness meditation.

1. Sit up straight on a straight-backed chair or cross-legged on the floor.
2. Focus on one aspect of your breathing, such as the sensations of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth, or your belly rising and falling as you inhale and exhale.
3. Once you've narrowed your focus in this way, begin to widen your concentration area. Become aware of sights, sounds, sensations, and your ideas.
4. Observe, accept and consider each thought or sensation without judging it good or bad. If your mind starts to race or you get distracted, return your focus to your breathing. Then expand your awareness again.

## **Invest in yourself**

The effects of mindfulness meditation tend to be dose-related — the more you do, the more positive benefits you will see. Most people find that it takes at least 20 minutes for the mind to really begin to settle, so this is a reasonable way to start. If you're ready for a more serious commitment, you might dedicate yourself to 45 minutes of meditation at least six days a week. But you can get started by practicing the techniques described here for shorter periods.

## **Learning to stay in the present**

A less formal approach to mindfulness can also help you to stay in the present and fully participate in your life. You can choose any task or moment to practice informal mindfulness, whether you are eating, driving, showering, walking, touching a partner, or playing with a child or grandchild. Attending to these points will help:

- Start by bringing your attention to the sensations in your body
- Breathe in through your nose, allowing the air to expand downward into your lower belly. Let your abdomen expand fully.
- Now breathe out through your mouth
- Be aware of the sensations of each inbreath and outbreath
- Proceed with the task at hand slowly and with full deliberation
- Engage your senses fully. Notice each sight, touch, and sound so that you savor every sensation.

When you notice that your mind has wandered from the task at hand, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of the moment.