



## **Mindfulness: Making Moments Matter**

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Mindfulness is a practice that helps you connect with what you are experiencing in the present. Research has shown that mindfulness can positively affect your sense of well-being, even in the midst of illness. By focusing on your breath, you can find balance in the midst of distractions, demands and suffering. Mindfulness can help you live fully in the moment without getting stuck in it.

Mindfulness comes from the spiritual traditions of the East, where it has been taught and practiced for thousands of years. In the West, mindfulness has played a greater role in healthcare, especially during the past three decades.

### **How will mindfulness help me?**

Mindfulness will help you pay attention to what you are experiencing moment by moment. When you are mindful, you are aware of your thoughts, feelings and body sensations. You notice the thoughts that are flitting through your mind and the feelings that go with them. You notice the sensations in your body.

When you are mindful, you are observing what is happening around and inside you without judgment. You are both fully in your experience and slightly removed from it. You notice and accept all the thoughts, feelings and sensations you are experiencing in the moment. But you know that another fresh moment is coming that will bring other thoughts, feelings and sensations.

### **The power of noticing**

Getting stuck in certain ways of thinking or feeling occurs when you are not fully in the moment. Your mind is on something in the future, or your feelings are caught up in something from the past. In moments like these, you are unaware of the richness and possibilities available to you in the present. When you are mindful, you notice the ongoing stream of your sensations, thoughts and emotions. You notice what you push away, what you hold on to, and what you desire. You notice the choices you are making, and you are no longer on automatic pilot. Noticing can help you wake up to what you are experiencing.

### **Why is the breath important?**

Your breath is with you wherever you go. Sometimes it is rapid and shallow; sometimes, it is slow and deep. The changing rhythms of your breath reflect what is happening around and inside you. It connects you to what you are experiencing in your body and mind. Paying attention to your breath is a way of coming home to yourself and is a key to living mindfully. Noticing your breath can help you stay in touch with your mind and body in the here and now.

### **Observing your thoughts**

When you focus on your breath, sooner or later (usually sooner) thoughts will arise. This is normal. This is what minds do. When you become aware that your attention has shifted from your breath to your thoughts, you can observe what your thoughts are about and what feelings arise with these thoughts. Then you can guide your attention back to your breath. In this way, you create a sense of inner spaciousness in which you can notice your thoughts without becoming preoccupied by them.

### **Observing sensations in your body**

Staying in touch with your breath can help you observe sensations in your body. When you use your breath to ground yourself in the moment, you can enhance the quality of what your body experiences. For example, if you are aware in each moment of what you eat, you may increase your pleasure in the



sight, texture and taste of your food. Taking a mindful walk can also heighten your senses. You are more likely to feel a breeze or sunshine on your skin; see how clouds and trees move against the sky; hear bird songs and children at play; or feel your muscles moving and heart beating. You can even mindfully brush your teeth, wash the dishes, pause at a red light, take a shower or enter a room. Mindfulness helps you to live in your body more fully and to be grateful for all that your body allows you to experience.

### **Breathing through physical discomfort**

Your breath can also help you cope with uncomfortable body sensations. If you are experiencing physical discomfort, you may want to try one of the following:

- Turn your attention to your breath. By focusing on your breath, you may be able to take a step back from your discomfort. When you withdraw your attention from your physical symptoms and give them their own space, they may become less overwhelming.
- Use your breath as an anchor to focus your attention on the discomfort itself. Become aware of the thoughts and feelings you have about your discomfort with a sense of gentle curiosity. Accept distressing sensations and your thoughts and feelings about them as part of where you are right now. Remember that what you are experiencing in your body in this moment could be different in the next.
- Focus on your breath to create a quiet inner space for noticing the uncomfortable sensations in your body. What is your body trying to tell you? How do you feel about what is happening in your body? Are you rejecting how you are feeling or judging how you are reacting? Honour your body by listening to the messages it is trying to send you.

### **How do I practice mindfulness?**

Practicing mindfulness starts with an intention to make each moment matter. The next step is a commitment to set aside time for mindfulness meditations and exercises. Embracing attitudes and practices for cultivating mindfulness will enhance your development and experience of mindfulness.

### **Seven attitudes for cultivating mindfulness**

In his groundbreaking books (see Resources), Jon Kabat-Zinn describes seven attitudes that are important for cultivating mindfulness:

- Non-judging – letting each moment be just what it is without labelling it as “good” or “bad”
- Patience – letting your life unfold in its own time and way
- Beginner’s mind – seeing everything as if for the first time
- Trust – feeling confident about your ability to learn from observing your experience
- Non-striving – backing off from striving for results
- Acceptance – seeing things as they actually are in the present, moment by moment
- Letting go – putting aside the tendency to cling to some experiences and reject others

### **Practices for cultivating mindfulness**

There are many practices for cultivating mindfulness, and it may take a while to find which work best for you. The ones you choose will affect the amount of time you need each day for them. Generally you may wish to spend 15 to 45 minutes a day on the practices that suit you. Regular practice will gradually begin to affect how you experience life. You may begin to notice moments of centredness or inner spaciousness. These are not things to strive for, but they may occur as you practice.

The following briefly describe a variety of practices for cultivating mindfulness:

#### **Belly breathing**

Sit or lie in a comfortable position (with your eyes closed, if you wish). Bring your attention to your belly. As you inhale, feel how your belly expands. When you exhale, feel how your belly relaxes. Continue to be with each in-breath and out-breath, riding the waves of your breathing. When you notice that your mind has wandered, bring your attention back to your breath and the rising and falling of your belly. Continue practicing for at least five minutes.

You can also tune into your breathing from time to time during the day. Become aware of your thoughts and feelings at these moments, without judging them or yourself.

#### **Sitting meditation**

Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor, your spine straight, and your hands on your thighs or touching lightly in your lap. Begin by focusing on your breath. When your mind wanders, notice where it goes and gently bring your attention back to your belly and your breath. Continue for at least 10



minutes.

When keeping your attention on your breath becomes easier, you can expand your sitting meditation in any of the following ways:

- Sitting with the body as a whole: Bring your awareness to your body as a whole as you sit.
- Sitting with sound: Listen to sounds without labelling or judging them. Hear the silences between sounds, too.
- Sitting with thoughts and feelings: Notice your thoughts come and go. Observe them as objects or events in your mind without getting caught up in their content. Note what each thought is about and what feelings go with it. Be aware of how thoughts move on if you don't get involved in them and how some thoughts keep coming back.
- Sitting with choiceless awareness: Just sit without focus or expectation. Be completely open to whatever comes into your awareness. Let it come and go, observing in stillness. Allow yourself simply to "be," moment by moment.

### **Body scan**

Lie or sit in a comfortable place and allow your eyes to close gently. Feel the rising and falling of your belly with each in-breath and out-breath.

Begin the body scan by feeling your body's points of contact with what you are lying or sitting on. Then bring your attention to your toes of your left foot, feeling the sensations in that region. If you don't feel anything, just be aware of that. Slowly bring your attention to each region of your body – left toes, left foot, left calf, left thigh, left buttocks, right toes, right foot, right calf, right thigh, right buttocks, pelvis, lower back and abdomen, upper back and chest, both shoulders, fingers on each hand, both arms, neck and throat, face, back of the head, and top of the head.

Breathe into and out of each region of your body, observing the sensations you are experiencing. When you notice that your attention has wandered, bring your mind back to your breath and the region you are focusing on.

### **Walking meditation**

Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart and bring your attention to your breath for a few moments. As you begin to walk, notice how your weight shifts as you raise one foot and step forward. Be fully aware of that foot contacting the ground and your weight shifting to it, while you lift your other foot and step forward.

If possible, coordinate your footsteps with your breathing. Try inhaling while you raise the heel of one foot, exhaling when it is raised, inhaling as you move the foot forward, and exhaling as you place it firmly on the ground. Then repeat inhaling and exhaling as you raise, pause, move and plant your other foot.

You could also take two or more steps with each in-breath and out-breath. Choose a pace that allows you to pay attention to both your breathing and your walking. A suitable pace helps you to be fully present with each step and each breath. When your mind wanders, draw your attention back to what you are experiencing while you breath and walk.

Observing the sensations that arise from breathing and walking is at the heart of this meditation and is a good place to start. However, you can expand the meditation by opening your senses to everything around you. Using your breathing and walking as an anchor, bring your awareness to everything you see, touch and sense. Notice the thoughts and feelings that arise from these connections.

### **Loving-kindness meditation**

Begin by calming your mind with mindful breathing. Then consciously offer love and kindness toward yourself by inwardly saying words such as: "May I be at peace. May I be free from anger. May my heart be open. May I be filled with compassion. May I be healed. May I be a source of healing for others."

Continue by wishing other people well. Picture a person in your mind's eye and hold him or her in your heart. Inwardly direct words, such as the following, toward that person: "May you be happy. May you be free from pain and suffering. May you experience love and joy."

End by coming back to your own body and breath. Enjoy the sense of connection you have with yourself and others.

### **Resources**

Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness into healthcare at the [University of Massachusetts Medical Centre](#) in 1979. The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program he started has benefited thousands of people. Kabat-Zinn's books continue to be some of the most helpful for anyone wanting to learn

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- Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness is a bestseller that captures the essence of his teaching and program. CDs with the book's guided meditations are also available.
- [Wherever You Go There You Are](#): Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life is a helpful guide for both the beginner and the long-time practitioner.
- [Mindfulness for Beginners](#) comes with a CD that includes five guided mindfulness meditations.

Mindfulness programs are available in many communities. They can be a helpful way to learn about mindfulness and to develop mindful practices in your life. The guidance and encouragement of leaders, the support of other group members, and the structure of the program can keep your motivation high and answer your questions as they arise.

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