Learn About Mindfulness and How to Do It [brown]

Due to its numerous physical, mental and emotional benefits, “Mindfulness” is a method that has become common in recent years. But what is it? Let’s explain.

Mindfulness is a *practice* anyone can do. It’s often called Mindfulness Meditation. It is also used as a therapy. Simply put, mindfulness is *focused awareness of present experience with acceptance of whatever passes through your experience in the moment*.

With no judgment of which thoughts are good or bad – they are just thoughts. With no judgment of which thoughts matter more than other thoughts – they are just thoughts and you, The Thinker, evenly hover above them all. With no identification with the thoughts or feelings – they are not you!

Mindfulness includes three elements: [brown]

1) Focusing the mind on the experiences of the present moment, including all the sensory information around you, your breath, the state of your body, your emotions

2) Letting the thought-stream – that means all the various thoughts, feelings, and sensations that never stop going through the mind – just go through the mind, without going off into one or another of the thoughts, but just letting them all flow through awareness.

3) Maintaining a non-judgmental, neutral, accepting attitude toward whatever appears in your experience

Some History of Mindfulness [brown]

About 2500 years ago, it was observed that we may experience discomfort, unpleasantness, and even pain, but those experience can move out, replaced by others. However, when we identify with those more negative experiences and we focus on those, the discomfort turns into suffering. Conversely, when we understand that those negative experiences are just thoughts that pass through us, just like the flow of a river passing the bridge from which you are watching the current, then suffering diminishes.

In the United States, mindfulness gained popularity in the late 20th century. Key figures like Jon Kabat-Zinn, Tara Brach, and Jack Kornfield, adapted the Asian practice of mindfulness meditation in order to make it useful as a therapy. Kabat-Zinn introduced evidence-based Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) back in 1979.

Over forty years of research shows numerous benefits to learning the practice of 1) being focused on the NOW, the present moment, 2) disconnecting from the endless stream of thoughts that take us away from the present moment, and 3) bringing our awareness back to NOW without judgment.

Benefits (use the brown font)

* Stress Reduction: Mindfulness can reduce the physiological and psychological effects of stress.
* Improved Mental Health: Mindfulness helps manage anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges.
* Enhanced Emotional “Regulation”: Mindfulness cultivates emotional awareness and resilience, allowing you to improve control over your reactions.
* Better Physical Health: It really can lower blood pressure, improve sleep, and boost the immune system.

Increased Focus and Concentration: Mindfulness enhances cognitive abilities and productivity.

* Enhanced Relationships: It improves communication, empathy, and compassion.

When we feel anxious or depressed our thoughts might be more focused on the past, with regret. We might focus on the future, with fear of the unknown. With so much stimulation in our everyday lives, it can be difficult to focus on the NOW. In these situations, sometimes an intentional act of grounding can help. Mindfulness techniques like breathing awareness, body scans, mindful eating, compassion, or guided meditation can help you focus in the moment and bring you back to the present.



Practicing Mindfulness [brown]

It sounds easy. However, we tend to think about anything but the present moment. We think about the past. We think about the future. Rather than non-judgmental acceptance, we judge our experiences. Rather than treating all thoughts we some equivalence, we treat certain feelings and thoughts as if they were more important than others. For example, if a driver were to honk and holler at you for unintentionally cutting him off, if you are like most people, you might be bothered by that for some time – with a rise in blood pressure and irritation. But the next moment, you could have been aware that driver x moved on, you were safe without a collision, and you are on your way.

Be in the Moment – Washing Your Hands Mindfully [brown]

Let’s practice with something you do a few times a day. Practicing mindfulness can happen anywhere. Think for a moment about when you are washing your hands:

When you feel the temperature of the water as it goes over your skin, the tension in your body due to the shift of several degrees. As you rub your hands, stop a moment, paying attention to your breathing. As you breathe, listen to the sound of the water as it rushes out of the spout and notice your body beginning to relax. As you continue, notice the lather, the ease of moving your hands together, aided by the lubrication of the soap. Look at your hands and watch without questioning if you are doing it right. Just do it. Then rinse your hands, watching the soap wash away, feeling the temperature and weight of the water. Let your hands drip in the sink. Then, as you dry your hands, notice the feel of the towel, its texture. Notice the feeling of dryness now.

Comment: By focusing your mind on an activity, even a mundane, ordinary one, you are practicing mindfulness.

You could do the same by walking, noticing what is ordinarily unconscious, such as your foot touching and bending on the ground and the movement of your knees through space. As you pay attention to your posture, you can pair your breath with your movement, feeling the heat your body may be producing or the sudden cold breeze that passes your skin

You could do the same when eating, taking far longer to experience all the sensations from the texture and flavor of the food.

Mindful Breathing [brown]

In general, to practice mindfulness, choose a space that is quiet. Choose a chair or place in that space where you feel comfortable. Just focus on your breath or other sensations in your body as you breath in and out, breathing out for a longer time than breathing in. Allow yourself to just focus on your breath. If your mind wanders, which it will, acknowledge the fact that it happened and gently return your focus to your breath without judgment. You may notice other sensations or sounds in the environment. Just notice them and let them move on, replaced by others. Expect to be distracted externally or by your own thoughts. Always bring your wandering awareness back to your breathing, It’s as simple as that. When starting out, start small, 5-to-10-minute sessions to start with.

While meeting with one of our trained staff can assist you in further using this resource as part of your therapeutic journey, there can be additional steps you start with now in order to start honing this skill.

Some Valuable and Popular Mindfulness Exercises [brown]

Online, you can find literally hundreds of mindfulness exercises. We will lead you through some of the most common mindfulness practices.

Awareness in the Now [brown]

1. Body Scan: A guided journey through your body to promote relaxation.

2. Breath Awareness: Focusing on the sensations of your breath.

3. Walking Meditation: Bringing mindfulness to each step.

4. Mindful Eating: Savoring each bite of food.

5. Mountain Meditation: Visualizing yourself as a strong, unchanging mountain.

6. 3-Minute Breathing Space: A quick reset for busy moments.

Disconnecting from the Thought Stream [brown]

1. Noting Practice: Labeling thoughts and emotions as they arise.

2. Leaves on a Stream

3. Bubbles Passing By

Living with Equanimity [brown]

1. Loving-Kindness Meditation: Sending wishes of well-being to yourself and others.

2. Gratitude Meditation: Reflecting on things you're grateful for.

Mindfulness Meditation: Focusing on the breath or a specific object to cultivate awareness.

