

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings as they happen moment by moment, and to the world around you. This can improve your mental and physical wellbeing. Mindfulness can bring awareness that helps us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better.

Professor Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre says "It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living 'in our heads' – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour".

"An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment. That might be something as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs. It's about allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives."

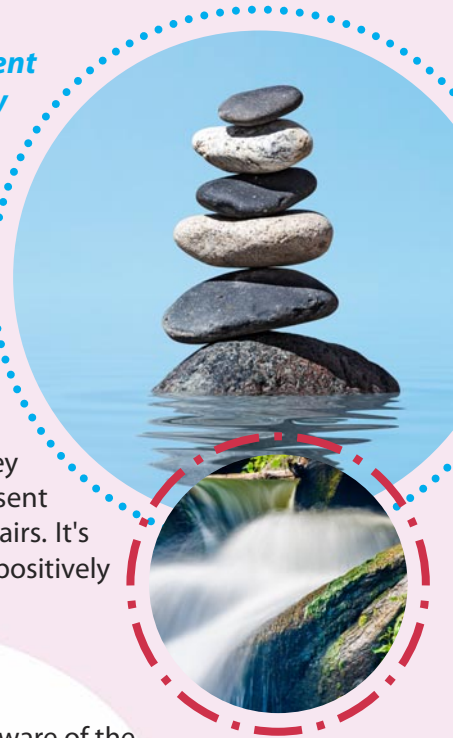
How does mindfulness help?

- Awareness of unhelpful thinking patterns- Mindfulness allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and feelings that we experience and to see how we can become entangled in that stream in ways that are not helpful.
- Feeling less overwhelmed and being clearer in our thinking.
- Awareness of this kind also helps us notice signs of or earlier and helps us deal with them better.
- Anxiety, depression and irritability all decrease with regular mindfulness practice.
- Increased sense of calmness and ease.
- Improvement in memory.
- Boosts immune system-helping to fight off colds, flu and other diseases.
- It can also reduce the impact of chronic conditions.
- Become kinder to ourselves and others. It helps us to respond not react to things that happen-being mindful will help you avoid exaggerating your negative emotions.

Ways to build mindfulness into your own life:

Mediation through a regular sit-down practice can be very effective however not everyone can successfully make that part of their day. Mindfulness does not require a separate meditation practice or even additional time out of your busy day. There are plenty of simple ways to include mindfulness practice into everyday living.

- **Notice the everyday:** Even as we go about our daily lives, we can take notice of our thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around us. This is the first step to mindfulness. Professor Williams says "All this may sound very small, but it has huge power to interrupt the 'autopilot' mode we often engage day to day, and to give us new perspectives on life."
- **Keep it regular:** It can be helpful to pick a regular time – the morning journey to work or a walk at lunchtime – during which you decide to be aware of the sensations created by the world around you.
- **Try something new:** Trying new things, such as sitting in a different seat at mealtimes or going somewhere new for lunch, can also help you notice the world in a new way.



● **Watch your thoughts:** For some people as soon as they stop what they're doing, their minds start racing with worries and thoughts. Be gentle with yourself. Mindfulness is not about making these thoughts go away, but rather about seeing them as mental events which you can choose to let go. Professor Williams says "Imagine standing at a bus station and seeing 'thought buses' coming and going without having to get on them and be taken away. This can be very hard at first, but with gentle persistence it is possible".

● **Name thoughts and feelings:** To develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings, some people find it helpful to silently name them: "Here's the thought that I might fail that exam". Or, "This is anxiety".

Do your routine activities mindfully: Everything you do can be a way of practicing mindfulness, especially those activities that are not demanding. Try to **pay more attention** as you're brushing your teeth before bed, for example. Try to be more aware – **activate all of your senses**. Maybe you'll find those activities more interesting than you thought. Other activities could include showering, making your bed, drinking your tea. Next time you're drinking a cup of tea (or coffee) be aware of at least the first minute of the experience.

Choose a mindfulness cue: Place an x or visual reminder somewhere obvious (e.g. fridge door) to remind you to be mindful.

Your mindfulness place: Choose a space in your environment in which you will be mindful whenever you are in it.

Wash your hands: Wash your hands mindfully, feeling the sensation of the water and soap.

Walk Mindfully: Pay attention for a few moments to the sensation of your feet against the ground. As you walk to the shop or from one room to another practice mindfulness. Focus on your breathing and each step you take.

Pay attention to your breathing: Your breath can be of great help in maintaining mindfulness and a state of calm. Mindfulness is about returning your attention again and again to what is actually happening right now. Your breathing is happening right now. Every time you return your attention to your breathing, you build your "mindfulness muscle".

- Stop & take 3 deep breaths before starting a new task
- 7/11 breathing: Count silently to seven as you breathe in and then count silently to eleven as you breathe out.

Practice, practice, practice: Remember nothing can be done in one day. Try practicing these tips for a few days and they will become even easier. Try practicing them for a few weeks and they will become habits!

Resources: where to find out more:

Popular Smartphone Apps: Check your smartphone's App Store for many more.

- **Insight Timer** Free app designed for timing your mindfulness meditations.
- **The Mindfulness App** Guided or silent meditations of one minute or upwards.
- **Headspace** 10 days of free meditations and pay for a subscription for all the features.
- **Ten Percent Happier** ● **CALM**

Books:

- ***Mindfulness on the Go*** Padraig O' Morain. As the name suggests this handbook gives suggestions for ways to help you slow down, refocus and practice in a form of mindfulness that actually fits in with your busy life.
- ***Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness Meditation for everyday life*** Jon Kabat-Zinn. Short mindfulness reflections.
- ***Quiet The Mind*** Matthew Johnstone. Meditation for beginners. Describes practical ways to manage obstacles to meditation.
- ***Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World*** Mark Williams & Danny Penman. User-friendly, comes with a CD with simple guided meditations. Also available as an audiobook. Useful for stress management, coping with anxiety & depression & chronic pain.

Online:

- **www.padraigomorian.com** Free resources, including audios, articles and free newsletter and a daily mindfulness reminder
- **www.freemindfulness.org** Many good, free resources, including audios
- **www.everyday-mindfulness.org** Articles, links and discussion forums
- **www.mindful.org** Lots of articles, interviews and tips
- **YouTube** Videos on mindfulness

