

Mindfulness

More than Meditation



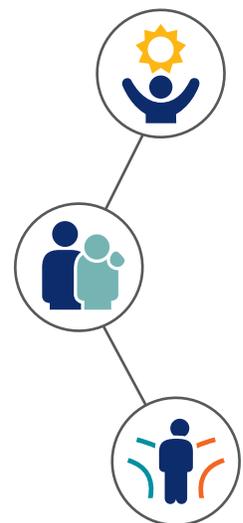
Mindfulness happens when we are aware of where we are, what we are doing, and not reacting or responding to what is going on around us (www.mindful.org). It is active attention to the immediate present. It also involves accepting our current thoughts.

Everyone can have “mindfulness.” It typically requires practice. To be mindful, one needs to focus on what we are experiencing from each of our senses, rather than focusing on what is going on around us. It is not the same thing as meditation, which usually involves mindfulness being used for mental exploration. Mindfulness allows us to avoid our usual responses to stimuli and to focus on what we are sensing at the moment. Specifically, mindfulness excludes judgment.

Ways to be mindful include:

- Set aside time every day to be mindful. Early in the morning is a good time for many people, before the bustle of the day starts. It also allows for an excellent start to the day.

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Ways to be mindful include: *continued*

- Practice paying attention to the moment. Focus on each of your senses in sequence. The idea is not to evaluate or judge anything, nor to “clear the mind.”
- When you find your mind drifting, which is virtually impossible to avoid, practice returning to the present. It does not help to judge oneself for the natural tendency without practice to have one’s mind drift.
- This sounds very simple, and it is, but it’s not easy. Practice helps, and eventually, mindfulness becomes almost second nature.
- Do not push away, suppress, or judge either positive or especially negative thoughts. Acknowledge them and “sit” with these thoughts. That way, they lose their potency.
- One way to determine if our ability to be mindful is improving is to consider a challenging or overwhelming issue and to reflect on “what good would it do” to worry about that issue.

One advantage of mindfulness is that it allows us to spend less mental time either reliving or dwelling in the past or anticipating or overthinking the future. Much mental energy used in these two pursuits can be redirected to mindful contemplation, which is innately relaxing.

Mindfulness has been incorporated into several types of therapy that address chronic pain, anxiety, and even self-destructiveness. Mindfulness can help behavior change with habits we want to change, such as smoking. The “trigger” for the habit can lose its potency and be replaced with another activity.

If you are in emotional crisis, thinking about suicide, or are concerned about someone who might be, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. You can also call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.



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