

Mindfulness: Taking Time for What Matters



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Submission: September 27, 2017; **Published:** October 04, 2017

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Abstract

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names. It is easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's 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 trying to notice those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour. When we bring awareness to what we directly experiencing through our senses, or to your state of mind through our thoughts and emotions, we're being mindful. Most of the people are forgetful, their mind is entangled in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. The state of being is called Forgetfulness; you are there but not there.

Origin of Mindfulness

The origin of mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist philosophy and practice tradition more than two and half thousand years old. Mindfulness can be practiced by anyone of any faith and religion and involves training the mind and doesn't enforce any religious belief system. The two main approaches seen in recent years are Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) both are taught over a number of sessions.

How to Become Mindful

Mindfulness is a skill that takes time to develop. It requires a certain level of effort, time, patience, and ongoing practice like any other skill. Mindfulness is taught in a number of ways. Meditation is one of the key techniques used in mindfulness training, but not the only technique. Mindful techniques and exercises help in focussing on your breathing. This aims to help – create space between you and stressful situation, and choose how to respond. For e.g.; if you're in a stress situation and feel overwhelmed with negative thoughts, you can stop and focus your attention on your breathing or notice the sensation of your feet on the floor. This can help you observe the negative thoughts with your objectivity. Detect negative emotions and look after yourself before the feeling get worse. For e.g.; tension, worry or anxiety is felt in certain areas of our body only, such as increased heart rate, tensing of the muscles or a slight breathing. If we

notice and analyse them, it will help us look after ourselves. Mindfulness uses different terms and ideas to help us become more aware of our own thoughts and feelings. These are:

Automatic Pilot

Describes times when we are not really paying attention to things or activities we are doing in our daily life. This will be helpful as it will allow us to remember and let us complete our daily activities easily, at the same time we in do get caught up in some unhelpful thoughts and actions when we are on auto-pilot. Mindfulness helps us in paying more attention when doing daily routine tasks such as eating, bathing, sleeping or walking.

Doing Mode and Being Mode

Two ways of thinking – "Doing mode" when we are constantly busy and responding to our demands around you. This helps us to resolve our issues and conflicts and achieve our goals and on the other hand leaves us feeling stressed and anxious. Mindfulness helps us in thinking differently called "Being mode" wherein you are happy to accept the situations as they are without putting much pressure on ourselves.

Acceptance

Being mindful which means paying attention to difficult feelings without judging ourselves or trying to find a solution, we are just accepting them as they are. Accepting our problems

or difficult feelings means putting ourselves in a bad situation – instead we are paying attention or acknowledging our feelings and see if there's something you can do to feel better.

Techniques/ Pocket Mindfulness

There are 6 exercises that take very little effort and can be done pretty much anywhere at any time:

- a) Mindful breathing
- b) Mindful observation
- c) Mindful awareness
- d) Mindful listening
- e) Mindful immersion
- f) Mindful appreciation
- g) Mindfulness Exercises You Can Try Today

Mindful Breathing

This exercise can be done standing up or sitting down and pretty much anywhere at any time. If you can sit down in the meditation (lotus) position, that's great, if not, no worries.

Either way, all you have to do is be still and focus on your breath for just one minute.

Start by breathing in and out slowly. One breath cycle should last for approximately 6 seconds.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body. Let go of your thoughts. Let go of things you have to do later today or pending projects that need your attention. Simply let thoughts rise and fall of their own accord and be at one with your breath.

Purposefully watch your breath, focusing your sense of awareness on its pathway as it enters your body and fills you with life. Then watch with your awareness as it works work its way up and out of your mouth and its energy dissipates into the world. If you are someone who thought they'd never be able to meditate, guess what? You are half way there already! If you enjoyed one minute of this mind-calming exercise, why not try two or three?

Mindful Observation

This exercise is simple but incredibly powerful because it helps you notice and appreciate seemingly simple elements of your environment in a more profound way. The exercise is designed to connect us with the beauty of the natural environment, something that is easily missed when we are rushing around in the car or hopping on and off trains on the way to work. Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on watching it for a minute or two. This could be a flower or an insect, or even the clouds or the moon. Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at.

Simply relax into watching for as long as your concentration allows. Look at this object as if you are seeing it for the first time. Visually explore every aspect of its formation, and allow yourself to be consumed by its presence. Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its purpose within the natural world.

Mindful Awareness

This exercise is designed to cultivate a heightened awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve. Think of something that happens every day more than once; something you take for granted, like opening a door, for example. At the very moment you touch the doorknob to open the door, stop for a moment and be mindful of where you are, how you feel in that moment and where the door will lead you.

Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that enable this process and the brain that facilitates your understanding of how to use the computer. These 'touch point' cues don't have to be physical ones. For example: Each time you think a negative thought, you might choose to take a moment to stop, label the thought as unhelpful and release the negativity or, perhaps each time you smell food, you take a moment to stop and appreciate how lucky you are to have good food to eat and share with your family and friends. Choose a touch point that resonates with you today and, instead of going through your daily motions on autopilot, take occasional moments to stop and cultivate purposeful awareness of what you are doing and the blessings these actions bring to your life.

Mindful Listening

This exercise is designed to open your ears to sound in a non-judgmental way, and indeed to train your mind to be less swayed by the influence of past experiences and preconception. So much of what we "feel" is influenced by past experience. For example, we may dislike a song because it reminds of us of a breakup or another period of life when things felt negative. So the idea of this exercise is to listen to some music from a neutral standpoint, with a present awareness that is unhindered by preconception. Select a piece of music you have never heard before. You may have something in your own collection that you have never listened to, or you might choose to turn the radio dial until something catches your ear. Close your eyes and put on your headphones.

Try not to get drawn into judging the music by its genre, title or artist name before it has begun. Instead, ignore any labels and neutrally allow yourself to get lost in the journey of sound for the duration of the song.

Allow yourself to explore every aspect of track. Even if the music isn't to your liking at first, let go of your dislike and give your awareness full permission to climb inside the track and dance among the sound waves.

Explore the song by listening to the dynamics of each instrument. Separate each sound in your mind and analyze each one by one.

Hone in on the vocals: the sound of the voice, its range and tones. If there is more than one voice, separate them out as you did in step 4. The idea is to listen intently, to become fully entwined with the composition without preconception or judgment of the genre, artist, lyrics or instrumentation. Don't think, hear.

Mindful Immersion

The intention of this exercise is to cultivate contentment in the moment and escape the persistent striving we find ourselves caught up in on a daily basis. Rather than anxiously wanting to finish an everyday routine task in order to get on with doing something else, take that regular routine and fully experience it like never before. For example: if you are cleaning your house, pay attention to every detail of the activity. Rather than treat this as a regular chore, create an entirely new experience by noticing every aspect of your actions: Feel and become the motion when sweeping the floor, sense the muscles you use when scrubbing the dishes, develop a more efficient way of wiping the windows clean. The idea is to get creative and discover new experiences within a familiar routine task. Instead of labouring through and constantly thinking about finishing the task, become aware of every step and fully immerse yourself in the progress. Take the activity beyond a routine by aligning yourself with it physically, mentally and spiritually. Who knows, you might even enjoy the cleaning for once!

Mindful Appreciation

In this last exercise, all you have to do is notice 5 things in your day that usually go unappreciated. These things can be objects or people; it's up to you. Use a notepad to check off 5 by the end of the day.

The point of this exercise is to simply give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life, the things that support our existence but rarely get a second thought amidst our desire for bigger and better things. For example: electricity powers your kettle, the postman delivers your mail, your clothes provide you warmth, your nose lets you smell the flowers in the park, your ears let you hear the birds in the tree by the bus stop, but... Do you know how these things/processes came to exist, or how they really work? Have you ever properly acknowledged how these things benefit your life and the lives of others? Have you ever thought about what life might be like without these things? Have you ever stopped to notice their finer, more intricate details? Have you ever sat down and thought about the relationships between these things and how together they play an interconnected role in the functioning of the earth? Once you have identified your 5 things, make it your duty to find out everything you can about their creation and purpose to truly appreciate the way in which they support your life.

Need for Mindfulness Exercises

The cultivation of moment-by-moment awareness of our surrounding environment is a practice that helps us better cope up with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause us stress and anxiety in everyday life. With regular practice of mindfulness exercises, rather than being led on auto-pilot by emotions influenced by negative past experiences and fears of future occurrences, we harness the ability to root the mind in the present moment and deal with life's challenges in a clear-minded, calm, assertive way. In turn, we develop a fully conscious mind-set that frees us from the imprisonment of unhelpful, self-limiting thought patterns, and enables us to be fully present to focus on positive emotions that increase compassion and understanding in ourselves and others.



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DOI: [10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.07.555701](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.07.555701)

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