



Mindfulness exercises

See how mindfulness helps you live in the moment.

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You've likely heard about mindfulness, also called mindfulness meditation. Research shows that mindfulness is a simple and practical way to lower stress, improve focus and support overall health. To begin practicing mindfulness, you don't need special equipment or training. Start with simple mindfulness exercises to find out if mindfulness is right for you.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a state of being mindful and aware of the present moment. It is a type of meditation in which you focus on your thoughts, feelings, body and surroundings. You do this without judgment. There's only awareness of the moment as it is. Research has shown that mindfulness can support both mental and physical well-being. Almost anyone can benefit from the practice of mindfulness.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness. You can be mindful during everyday tasks, such as eating or brushing your teeth. Or you can set aside a regular time to practice mindfulness. It can be done alone or in a group. Mindfulness meditation may include breathing methods, guided imagery, and other ways to relax the body and mind.

Common myths about mindfulness

Common mindfulness myths include:

- **You have to clear your mind.** You don't have to clear your mind. Mindfulness is about being aware of your thoughts as they are and letting them pass without getting caught up in them.
- **You have to sit still with your legs crossed for long periods.** You can practice mindfulness sitting, standing, walking or lying down. You can be mindful by focusing on any task you are doing or any emotion you are feeling as you go about your day. Even brief moments of mindful awareness during daily activities count.
- **It takes too much time.** Mindfulness can be as simple as taking a few deep breaths and being present in the moment. It may be a few minutes you spend quietly with your thoughts. Or you can do a body scan in 30 minutes or sit in a quiet space for an hour to unwind and relax after a busy day. How much time you give to mindfulness is up to you. Research shows that even 10 minutes of mindfulness makes a positive difference.

What are the benefits of mindfulness meditation?

Mindfulness meditation has many benefits for people of all ages. These benefits are well-supported by evidence-based studies and clinical trials. Research shows that practicing mindfulness can help with a variety of mental and physical health conditions, such as:

- **Stress.** Mindfulness calms the nervous system. This reduces the body's stress hormone, cortisol.
- **Anxiety.** Mindfulness can ease anxiety by helping you stay focused in the present instead of getting caught in worry loops, where you keep thinking about the same thing over and over.
- **Pain.** Mindfulness can help with long-lasting pain by changing how the brain processes pain signals.

- **Depression.** Mindfulness can help manage depression by raising awareness of negative thought patterns and reducing emotional reactions.
- **Sleep quality and insomnia.** Regular mindfulness practice can improve sleep by helping the mind and body relax at bedtime. Mindfulness can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep.
- **High blood pressure, also called hypertension.** Mindfulness may help lower blood pressure by easing stress. This helps the nervous system stay balanced.
- **Diabetes management.** Mindfulness helps lower cortisol, a hormone that raises blood sugar levels.
- **Asthma.** Mindfulness can help manage asthma by lessening stress-related flare-ups. It also can help with symptom awareness.

Research has shown that mindfulness also may lessen symptoms of illnesses that are long-lasting, called chronic illnesses. These include fibromyalgia, breast cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, breathing issues and chronic pain.

Everyday benefits of mindfulness

Mindfulness isn't only for anxiety or health conditions. You can use it every day to stay focused and move through your day calmer and with purpose. Here are some ways mindfulness may improve your day:

- **Better focus and attention.** Mindfulness teaches your mind to refocus when it wanders.
- **Less stress and burnout.** Short mindfulness moments taken during the day can help your body and mind release stress and reset.
- **More awareness and control.** Mindfulness makes you aware of your emotions, which can help you manage them better. This may help you stay calm or take a break when needed.
- **Better mood and more energy.** Mindfulness supports mental and emotional balance. It may help you feel more connected to the present moment and less drained by negative thoughts.

What are some examples of mindfulness exercises?

Mindfulness exercises can improve well-being and relax your body and mind in many simple ways.

To start enjoying the benefits of mindfulness, practice easy exercises throughout your day. Examples include:

- **Pay attention.** It's easy to get caught up in the rush and move through your day in a blur. Stop and catch your breath. Try to pause and experience what is around you. Use all your senses: touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat, slow down, smell your food, taste the flavors and feel the textures. Pay attention and fully enjoy the moment.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you focus on your breath, it helps distract your mind from overwhelming or negative thoughts. Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Focused breathing for only a minute can lower stress and improve clarity. You can do this at any time, walking, standing or sitting.
- **Live in the moment.** Breathe, look around you, and be present in the moment. Try to pay attention to your environment, your senses and what your body feels. Do this with no judgment, only observe.
- **Check in with your body.** Turn off screens and phones. Find a quiet place, and notice how your body feels. Mentally scan your body. Start at your head or feet. Notice each part as you move through your entire body. This is a quick mindfulness body scan.

Even a few minutes of mindfulness can boost your energy, make it easier to handle stress and improve your mood. Mindfulness is a simple way to help you move through your day with more control, clarity, calm and purpose.

Structured mindfulness exercises

If you find you enjoy practicing mindfulness, you may want to try more structured mindfulness exercises. To do this, find a quiet and comfortable space. Make sure

have time to fully focus on the exercises. They don't have to take much time, but you do need enough time to focus. Here are a few examples of structured mindfulness exercises:

- **Mindfulness breathing.** This is one of the most common and simplest starting points for mindfulness exercises.

Sit comfortably in a quiet space and close your eyes. Or keep them open if it's more comfortable. Breathe in a long, deep, slow breath through your nose. Breathe out through your mouth. Then repeat this many times. Focus on your breath. Be aware of and present in the moment.

- **Mindfulness body scan.** This common mindfulness exercise helps you notice what your body is feeling. A mindful body scan can lessen tension and bring a sense of calm. It also can help raise body awareness and appreciation.

Lie down or sit comfortably. If you lie down, lie on your back with your legs extended, arms at your sides, palms facing up. Sit up straight if you're sitting. Breathe in a long, deep, slow breath through your nose, then breathe out through your mouth. Keep breathing deeply. Move your attention slowly through each part of your body. Start at your head and work your way down through your toes. Or start at your toes and work up through your head. Notice anything your body is feeling, such as warmth or cold. Also, be aware of your emotions or thoughts about each part of the body. Avoid judging your feelings and thoughts.

- **Mindful walking.** Walk slowly and notice the feeling of each step. Pay attention to how your feet work to move and balance your body. Be aware of your environment and your senses, such as what you hear, feel and see.

There also are mindfulness classes and apps you may want to try. Many communities offer mindfulness classes. There also are apps you can download to smart devices. Check online or local resources to see what's available.

When and how often should I practice mindfulness exercises?

You can practice mindfulness anytime during the day for any length of time, whether indoors or outdoors. Research shows that practicing mindfulness outdoors awakens your senses and is especially helpful. You might find certain times of the day work best for you. You may choose to practice random moments of mindfulness throughout your day or make a weekly schedule. How you welcome mindfulness into your life is up to you.

Regular, daily practice is recommended to feel the full benefits. But even short moments of mindfulness throughout the day can be helpful. For example, take three mindful breaths or pause to notice your surroundings.

For most people, it's best to start with a few minutes a day of focused breathing. Breathing is the starting point for most mindfulness exercises. You can add more time and try other mindfulness exercises until you find what works best for you. That may be a combination of mindfulness exercises.

The more you practice mindfulness exercises, the easier and more natural they may feel. Try to practice mindfulness every day for about six months. Over time, you might find that mindfulness becomes an effortless habit that helps you feel less overwhelmed, more joyful and more present in your life.

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