

Tips For A Mindful Life



MINDSPACE

There are two ways to practice mindfulness. Formal practice uses guided meditations, but the best place to start if you are a beginner is with informal practice - when you let the practice into your every day life in a natural way. We hope these tips will help you do this, and inspire you to start your mindfulness journey!

When you first start to practice, you will likely notice how much your mind wanders and that it is quite difficult to stay focused on your breath or on anything else. Your attention will be drawn elsewhere, but this is perfectly normal! Just remember that when this happens, it doesn't mean you are doing it wrong – don't judge it, just be aware of it, and be patient with yourself.



The **breath** is an important aspect of mindfulness. We take 20,000 breaths a day, but we are unaware of most of them. When we focus on them, and pay attention to the breath, our minds are not able to be stuck in rumination or thinking so we naturally let go of our thoughts. Observing the breath takes us straight into the present moment.

Where can you feel yourself connecting more with your breath? Is it your nose? Your chest? Maybe it is in your throat or your lips. Identify where you most notice your breath and notice the sensation as you breathe in and out. Don't try to manage your breathing, just observe it. This can be your anchor point, the place where you can switch your attention to whenever you want to be mindful and aware of the present moment. Even if this is just for a few seconds, it can be very helpful.

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In the home

The home can be a relaxing space, but not always, especially with the demands of children and partners! However, mindfulness is a great tool to use to help stay out of old patterns of reaction or habits that don't always serve us very well.

Throughout the day there are opportunities to be mindful and chances to cultivate an attitude of curiosity. Even before the day begins you can form the intention to do so. Before you get out of bed, tell yourself "I will be mindful today" and pay attention to your body's contact with the bed and your breathing. When you get up, be aware of what you are doing and check your posture. Observe what is happening outside your window, listen to the morning sounds and pause for a moment.

Mindfulness can get even a tough day off to a better start, simply by paying attention to what is happening in the moment rather than grumbling to yourself about what your day has in store.

Try this...

Pick a routine activity that you do everyday, such as washing the dishes, and see if you can do it mindfully. Feel the warmth of the water, observe the soap on the surface, the reflection of light on the plates and experience the satisfaction as you clean them. You can also pay attention to your environment, if there are any sounds or smells, and of course, pay attention to your breathing.



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At Work

The workplace, or place of education or training, can be a stressful environment. We may have deadlines to meet, goals to achieve and expectations placed upon us. All of these can potential lead to cultivating unhelpful strategies, such as overworking, over or under eating, or even drinking too much.

Mindfulness enables your mind to be free from unhelpful thoughts, and therefore allows ideas and solutions to come more easily, and clears space for your creativity to rise to the surface. It enables you to be more productive and better able to handle stress.

Another great feature of mindfulness, particularly relevant for when you are at work, is that no one ever has to know you are practicing it!



Try this...

As you sit at your desk, breathe with awareness occasionally. Become aware of your posture, see if you can do your work without scrunching up your shoulders and your neck muscles. When moving around the workplace, bring your attention to your walking. Is there a picture on your wall? When was the last time you really saw it? Bring mindfulness to the computer. Look up from the screen sometimes and notice yourself breathing. Notice your fingers touching the keyboard. Notice yourself picking up the phone and connect with your breathing during the phonecall.

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Mindful Walking



*"When you drink just drink,
when you walk just walk"*

Zen saying

Sometimes when we walk, we are in automatic pilot mode. It is a time when we think and reflect on our problems and anxieties. You may go for a walk specifically to sort out some difficulty, turning it around in your mind to find a resolution. An alternative is to walk mindfully - if issues arise in your mind, you let them go and walk in the present moment, paying attention to bodily sensations.

For perhaps thousands of years, walking has been used as a mindfulness practice. Research shows that, after a brisk walk, people's moods improve, and the feeling lasts for at least a couple of hours after they have stopped. And it doesn't matter about your ability – you can walk fast or slow, either is helpful.



Try this...

Bring your attention to your feet making contact with the ground and the weight shifting from one to the other, or to the movement in your body as you walk - the sensations of your legs, feet, upper body and of your arms. Look at whatever is moving in your field of vision, perhaps birds flying across the sky, leaves in the breeze, ripples on water or swimming birds.

Appreciating your surroundings while walking is mindfulness meditation at its most basic.

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Mindful Eating

Eating mindfully has many benefits.



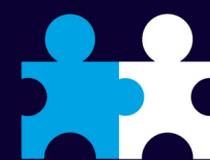
- It helps you to get much more pleasure out of food and helps you to savour the flavours, rather than being too busy lost in thought and not paying attention to what you are actually eating.
- It makes it much easier to eat enough but not too much. When we eat in a distracted way, we don't notice that we have eaten much more than we needed to. The signal from our stomachs to our brains that tells us we are full and it is ok to stop eating is sent about 20 minutes after you start eating, but we may have already eaten too much by the time we notice it, especially if we eat quickly. This means that mindfulness can contribute towards a healthy diet without actually dieting!
- It helps you to avoid wolfing down food to deal with negative emotions and can assist with spotting any unhelpful attitudes towards food that you may have.

Try this...

Take a raisin or a small square of chocolate. Spend at least one minute eating it. Notice what the texture is like in your mouth, notice the aroma, notice what it feels like to bite into it, what it feels like to allow it to melt, get a sense of the sensations on your tongue and in your mouth, resist the strong temptation to wolf it down in the first ten seconds. This can help you pay a great deal more attention to your food in future.



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Gratitude

Gratitude comes when we are mindful and observing the simple beauty in our lives. Gratitude for what you have is conducive to happiness, and mindfulness encourages this by making us more aware of the meaningful gifts in our lives, such as friendships or the natural world around us.

There are many benefits of practicing gratitude, including writing down everything you feel grateful for - people who do so are more optimistic, less stressed, feel more alive, sleep better, and express more compassion and kindness.



Try this...

Find a peaceful spot where you can sit and write. Note down all the things you are grateful for, these could include people close to you, things in your home, things about yourself or pleasurable memories. Read through your list and internally give thanks to each point you noted. Bring awareness to this moment. What are you grateful for right now? How does this feel in your body and where do you feel it? Pause, breathe and sit with gratitude.



It takes motivation and commitment to incorporate mindfulness into your life, but we hope that these tips will help you start to experience the many benefits it brings!