

Mindfulness 101

Mindfulness is the practice of paying full attention to the present. It is the art of using all of our senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) to keep us fully participating in the current moment.

We are often pulled into thoughts and memories about the past and about the future which can result in increased difficulties regulating our mood and can increase our overall sense of anxiety. Making a conscious effort to stay focused on the here and now has been shown to reduce our overall level of stress, improve sleep, improve mood, improve concentration, and improve our overall general health.

There is no “wrong” way to do Mindfulness nor is it about “getting good at it”. It is also not about “clearing the mind” as this is an impossible task. The very nature of mindfulness promotes a non-judgemental, non-striving stance. It is about cultivating an awareness of when the mind wanders and then bringing it back to focus. It is simply about setting an intention to pay attention.

Below and on the back of this sheet are some simple ways to practice Mindfulness. Research has shown that if we build some Mindfulness into our everyday lives, it will have a positive impact.

A Mindful Cup of Tea

Brew a cup of tea paying attention to the sights, sounds, and smells as you make it. Notice when your mind wanders to other things and bring it back to the tea. Once it is ready to drink, pay attention to how the cup feels in your hands, how the steam feels

against your face, how the tea smells, how the tea tastes, the noise that the cup makes against the counter or the spoon makes when stirring. Drink the tea in slow, deliberate sips and again bring your mind back whenever it wanders onto something else.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Start at your toes and slowly clench and release each subsequent body part working your way slowly up the body. Hold the clench for 3 seconds before releasing. A possible order would be toes, ankles, calves, thighs, buttocks, stomach, arms, hands, shoulders, eyes, mouth, face. Search on the internet for guided Progressive Muscle Relaxation videos.

Three Minute Breathing Space

In a comfortable position close your eyes and start by focusing on the inbreath and the outbreath. Then expanding your awareness to any thoughts, just observing them and noticing them without getting drawn in. Then switch your focus to your body. Noticing any sensations, any twitches or aches. Finally, switching your focus to your whole being (body, mind, and breath) and ending with a final focus again on the inbreath and outbreath. Search on the internet for a Three Minute Breathing Space to find guided auditory scripts.

Building in a Pause

Choose a routine part of your day to purposely cue yourself to stop and take three deep breaths and fully focus on just this. It could be when you come to a red light when driving, when you are paused for the elevator at work, before you walk into work or leave for home at the end of the day, when locking the front door, before getting out of bed in the morning, after brushing your teeth, etc. Intentionally attach this practice to anything that you do at least once a day.

Dance it Out

Put on a favourite piece of music and just dance it out. Pay attention to the beat, to the lyrics, to the movement in your body, to how your feet feel against the floor. Notice any thoughts that might be triggered by the music and redirect the focus back to the present moment and this current experience.

Mountain Meditation

Search on the web for a guided “Mountain Meditation”. Find a comfortable position and with your eyes closed listen to the audio file paying attention to the words. When your mind wanders, simply notice it and then bring it back to the voice.