

Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a concentrated state of awareness that can help us see and respond to situations with clarity and without getting carried away by emotions or the constant chatter in our heads.

Mindfulness enables us to:

- Better manage tension and stress
- Enhance objectivity, mental acuity and focus
- Communicate and make decisions more effectively
- Improve productivity

Meditation is the tool we use to cultivate mindfulness. With meditation, you intentionally pay attention to a particular object as a way to strengthen concentration. There are thousands of meditative techniques: Tai Chi, yoga, focusing on the breath and using a mantra are all examples.

People often think that meditating “correctly” means clearing all thought from the mind. This is a myth. The mind never stops thinking – it’s when we get caught up in our thoughts we lose mindfulness. By witnessing thoughts, allowing them to pass, and returning to your chosen object of focus, you can actually build the muscle of concentration. Think of meditation as a fitness routine for the mind.

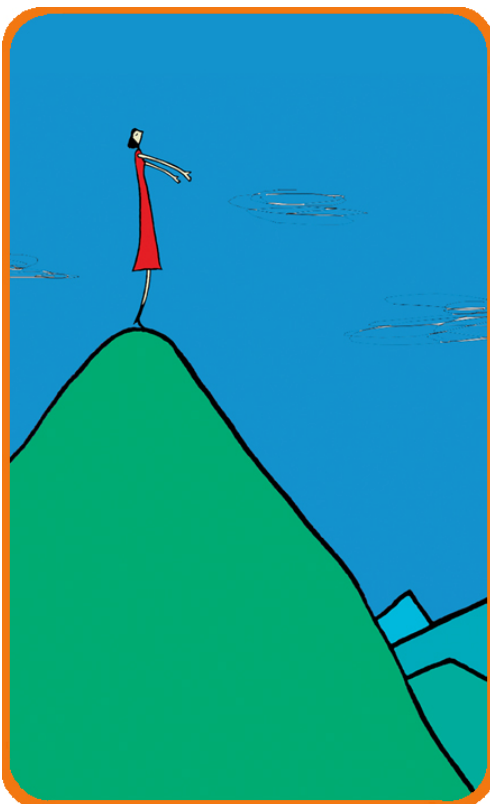
Are there other benefits to mindfulness?

In addition to boosting brain power, numerous research studies performed at Harvard, Duke, Stanford, and the National Institute of Health have shown significant physical benefits, including:

- Reduced blood pressure
- Lowered cholesterol levels
- Enhanced immune function
- Reduced headache, migraine, and back pain
- Improved respiratory function
- Decreased abdominal fat

Can mindfulness training be effective in the corporate setting?

Absolutely – just ask Google, General Mills, Apple, Texas Instruments and Hughes Aircraft. Each of these companies has used mindfulness programs to improve employee performance, enhance resilience and reduce absenteeism. *Business Week*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The Wall Street Journal* have also detailed the benefits of mindfulness in the corporate setting.



Daily Tips for Living Mindfully

- Be aware of your body as you wake up in the morning. Notice physical sensations – your heartbeat, breathing or points of contact with body and bed. Also, notice your thoughts. Where is your mind upon awakening?
- Notice all the sensations involved in your morning activities such as brushing your teeth, showering or eating breakfast.
- One or two days a week, drive to and from work without listening to music or the radio.
- Before you pick up the phone to answer it or make a call, take a brief pause and be aware of your body and breathing.
- When waiting in line, pay attention to the bodily sensations involved with standing. Notice your breathing.
- Before a meeting, take a moment to connect with your body and breath. Focus on any sensation you may be experiencing at that moment.
- When walking, notice your body moving and become aware of any sensations, including the wind, air, rain, sounds, birdcalls, etc.
- When you arrive at your destination, take a moment before getting out of the car, train, bus or plane to connect with your body and breath.
- Choose a couple of meals or snacks each week and be fully present. No talking, reading, or television. Stay completely focused on the meal, paying attention to the sensation of taste and texture of the food you are eating.
- Try “sitting” meditation, a method of practice that helps you train in mindfulness by focusing awareness on the breath.

How can I get started?

Any moment is a moment to be mindful. Choose a couple of these simple exercises to repeat consistently during the next week and pay attention to how you feel afterward.

Steps for Sitting Meditation

1. Assume a comfortable posture, either on the floor or sitting in a chair. Establish a sense of presence in your body.
2. Now, bring awareness to various bodily sensations – pulsing, vibration, points of contact between body and chair/floor, temperature – holding the whole body in your field of awareness.
3. Next, directing attention in a more focused way, notice the sensations present when you breathe in and when you breathe out.
4. Finally, rest awareness in the area of your body where the sensation of breathing is easiest to attend to. This may be the rise and fall of your abdomen, the movement of your chest or the sensation of air entering and leaving your nostrils.
5. Each time the mind wanders (and it will), gently and without judgment just move your awareness back to your breath.

Mindfulness...

- ...does not require a particular set of beliefs in order to learn and practice – it is a quality of mind, accessible and available to all;
- ...allows us to live every moment fully without the filters of bias, judgment, or emotional reaction;
- ...helps the body cope with physical challenges such as headaches, back pain, and even heart disease;
- ...keeps us from reacting too quickly – it helps increase the gap between impulse and action.