

WHAT CAN MINDFULNESS LOOK LIKE?

Mindfulness can be practiced in many different ways, from formal groups or classes to a short check-in with yourself on the way home from work. There is no right or wrong, and what you experience is what you experience. Here are some quick mindfulness techniques you can practice anywhere:

- Eat a meal without distractions like TV or any other devices. Pay attention to what you're eating and the different sensations that come up, and notice how it makes you feel.
- Go for a walk and set out to really pay attention to the environment around you using all your senses. What do you experience?
- Talk with a friend face-to-face without any distractions like phones. Focus on the conversation and really listen without judgments or expectations. Notice how you feel.
- Check in with yourself at any time. What thoughts do you notice? How do they make you feel?
- Take a minute to sit quietly and focus on the sensation of your breath. When you find yourself distracted by a thought, acknowledge the thought and redirect your attention back to your breath.
- There is always a different way to try mindfulness. If sitting mindfulness meditations make you feel restless, try a walking practice.

WHERE ELSE CAN YOU PRACTICE MINDFULNESS?

Many different community organizations offer mindfulness classes or courses. Check with your community centre, local schools, or community organizations. You can also find mindfulness resources online. Mindfulness is found in many different formal psychotherapy treatments, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Talk to your mental health care team to see if one of these approaches might be a good fit for you.

DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in hundreds of neighbourhoods across every province, CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive.

Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca.



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MINDFULNESS



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Many of us lead busy lives. We are busy thinking about yesterday and busy planning for tomorrow. When we focus on the past and future, we aren't paying a lot of attention to the present—where we are right now. Mindfulness is simply an invitation to step out of the clutter and really focus on what we are doing, thinking, and feeling in this moment.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a way of being. It's also a skill developed by deciding to slow down and taking the time to pay attention and be curious about things that we're experiencing and things that we see around us. Each of us can be mindful—we just don't do it often.

Mindfulness comes from Buddhism, but it can be as religious or non-religious as you'd like. Therapies used today in mainstream settings that use mindfulness are not religious.

Most people new to mindfulness first work on three of its main parts: attention, curiosity, and acceptance.

Mindfulness is a skill developed by deciding to slow down and taking the time to pay attention and be curious about things that we're experiencing.



Attention means that we are aware of things in and around us. This includes attention to internal thoughts, feelings, and body sensations as well as things happening in our environment, like sounds. It also includes paying attention to specific experiences, like the sensations that come up as we eat a meal.

Why is attention important? We spend a lot of time thinking about the past or focusing on the future. We can forget that we are here right now. Attention can help us notice all of the things we have in the present moment and understand how we are in our lives. Not everything we notice will be joyful. We may notice that we are tired or in pain, for example, but those observations are still useful.

Curiosity means exploring without judgment. We look at thoughts, feelings, or sensations from the perspective of an explorer, examining different perspectives so we can better understand what's going on. Curiosity helps us examine situations more objectively.

Why is curiosity important? It means that we're relating to things a bit differently than usual. A common habit is to judge thoughts, sensations, or other experiences around us. When we explore with judgment, it's easy for one critical thought to cascade and cause distress. For example, a small disagreement with a friend can lead to unrealistic fears about the future of the relationship. Practicing mindfulness may not stop judgments, but it can help us notice those thoughts.

Acceptance means embracing the present moment as it is, both the good and the bad, rather than resisting it or doing something quickly to change it.

Why is acceptance important? Sometimes, trying to control or change something isn't possible or the best approach. If we are feeling a lot of anxiety, for example, it's easy to get caught up in those uncomfortable feelings. We might do a lot of things to try and stop the sensations or feel angry at ourselves for not being able to control the anxiety. Acceptance in this case might mean simply acknowledging that we feel anxious and letting those feelings be, knowing that they will pass.

Attention, curiosity, and acceptance can have a huge impact on the way we feel and the way we live our lives. You might also notice that while they are simple concepts, they are not necessarily easy to do.

MINDFULNESS IS NOT:

- **An empty mind.** The goal of mindfulness is to notice thoughts and the way those thoughts make us feel. Mindfulness is about learning to explore the inner dialogue that is quick to judge something. Mindfulness does not eliminate thoughts altogether.
- **Only thinking good or happy thoughts.** Instead, mindfulness helps us become aware of all kinds of thoughts and sensations—pleasant or unpleasant—and helps us let them be.
- **Forced relaxation.** While mindfulness may reduce stress, relaxation is not the goal.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS?

Research shows that mindfulness can help improve well-being and quality of life. It may help people reduce stress and anxiety, manage symptoms of some mental illnesses and substance use problems, and improve physical health.

Mindfulness can help us look at our own lives more clearly. It can help develop a different relationship with our experiences and it can give us space to look at problems from all perspectives, without getting tangled in difficult thoughts or feelings that only make us feel worse.