

A GUIDE TO

MINDFUL LIVING



BY JESSICA HICKMAN



Mindfulness is paying attention on the present moment in a particular way—on purpose and non-judgementally.

It's all about being fully aware of our thoughts, emotions, body and surroundings. Practicing mindfulness means accepting what is, and not focusing on whether we like what's going on or not.

Quite often, when we're stressed, we don't realise what's happening with our bodies—inside and out. We're unaware that we're tightening our neck and shoulders, taking shallow breaths, clamping our jaw, slumping our posture, etc. Mindfulness involves being aware of each part of the body and how it's reacting to the current moment.

Mindfulness can be applied to listening, seeing, thinking and interacting with others. You can find plenty of mindfulness exercises online if you'd like to see what it's all about.

Benefits of Mindfulness

1. Emotional benefits

In a nutshell, mindfulness allows you to be as at peace as you can be in your situation. With mindful thinking, you can remain calmer, happier and more hopeful despite your surroundings. You will feel lighter emotionally, as you will no longer be carrying any stress with you.

With a more mindful emotional state, you will also enter a more accepting and tolerant one in which you may grow your relationship with yourself and others.

2. Cognitive benefits

With clearer and more positive thought processes, your decisions are more likely going to benefit you. Ever noticed that being in a bad mood can often get you into harder and more stressful situations? Often, our negative thought processes create destructive thinking and decision making.

Using mindfulness to fix your thought processes can improve your cognitive behaviours to become smarter and more beneficial, which aids both your emotional and professional state. A mindful reflection on your emotions and decisions also increases your emotional intelligence, allowing you to learn better from your past and present experiences.

3. Professional benefits

You know how they say exercise is great for your mental health? It works the same the other way around—a healthy mind actually leads to a healthier body.

Mindfulness is proven to relieve stress, which can help in treating heart diseases, lowering blood pressure, reducing chronic pain, improving sleep, and easing gastrointestinal difficulties which are all problems exacerbated by stress and stress-related illnesses.

With a healthier mind and body, you can be more productive at work and more willing to work. You will find that, with a more positive mindset, your ability to work in a team and/or lead a team will increase significantly. The increased emotional intelligence earned from mindfulness will also allow you to make better decisions regarding your own and others' work lives, and the directions you wish to take your work.



Practicing Mindfulness

1. Slow down - Slowing your day down, whether through a simple breathing exercise or an hour-long yoga session where you can slow down your thoughts and concentrate on your mind and body connection, is vital in practising mindfulness. By slowing down, we can better reflect on our emotions and understand the world and our circumstances in it.

2. Move - Go for a walk, jog, swim or do a little shake or dance. Moving your body gets the energy flowing through your muscles. Even just a big stretch in the morning to release all the tension you have built up overnight from your sleeping position is enough.

The endorphins produced through exercise allow you to perceive things more positively, and movement also prevents lethargy—the killer of getting on with your day and goals, from settling in.

3. Create your own space - You have a choice in who you wish to spend your life with. Surround yourself with the people, places and things that bring you joy, praise, hope and truth. Removing toxicity from your life—including the toxicity within yourself, is vital in becoming a more mindful person.

4. Setting Boundaries - Boundaries are the limits we set with other people, which indicate what we find acceptable and unacceptable in their behaviour towards us.

The word “boundary” can be a bit misleading. It conveys the idea of keeping yourself separate. But boundaries are actually connecting points since they provide healthy rules for navigating relationships, intimate or professional.

Boundaries can help you become more aware of your emotional worth - that you are entitled to your own feelings about a given situation, as do others. Setting boundaries for yourself and honouring the boundaries of others isn't rocket science, but it can help you learn new ways to take charge of your life.

5. Rest - We need to rest—utterly and completely. Sleep is the primary time in which our bodies heal and grow, but we are not conscious enough to appreciate and grow from what the rest of our mind feels.

6. Meditate - Practising meditation like yoga or even just having some quiet time without interruptions from technology gives you conscious time to reflect and reset from the stress. This, coupled with breathing exercises such as the 4-7-8 rule, will enable you to rest and recuperate outside of the bedroom. Meditation can be done in any quiet room by taking some time alone to calm and centre yourself with your immediate realities and senses. This brings you back to the present and prevents too much focus on the past or future, which can be daunting.

7. Gratitude - Forcibly being positive allows us to rewire our brains. It is estimated that within 28 days, if we consciously show gratitude, we can recalibrate our minds to think more positively. This takes effort and conscious thinking as it is not natural for us to always be positive, but inevitably, it will allow us to get more out of our everyday tasks and situations. A gratitude journal is a great way to keep track of your progress over 28 days.

8. Mindful listening – Give the speaker your full attention. Stop what you're doing, remove distractions, notice your thoughts and redirect your attention to what the speaker is saying. Mindful listening is the practice of listening consciously. It helps you become more aware of your mental habits when in conversation, and enables you to refocus and pay attention to the present moment.



9. Taking breaks – Aside from slowing down and resting when you have time or during the time you have set, it is important to take breaks between work and study. Of course, you cannot always achieve this while on shift work. But when you can, it is recommended to take a break every 90 mins.

It can be as quick as getting a cup of tea or coffee, or a glass of water to refresh yourself and maybe a little stretch to get your body out of that tense seated position. It is also best to avoid just going on your phone to check social media as the break becomes less productive and distracts you from your goal—we all know how time passes by while scrolling through TikTok or Facebook.

10. Accept the reality of emotions – Mindfulness is a state that allows you to recognise and accept your emotions, and enables you to move past them if they are holding you back. Joy should be appreciated, loved, and revisited, while anger should be accepted and reflected upon, but not held onto. It is okay to feel strong emotions, even without reason.

Mindfulness enables you to recognise that these emotions don't need to control your actions. If you feel stressed—take time, move, rest, do what you need to do to self-soothe and move on from the stress.

Mindfulness allowed me to recognise that I could grow past my experience with bullying and develop strength, resilience and self-love from it. Grounding myself and reflecting on my past and present situations enabled me to move forward smarter and more carefree knowing that my direction is hopeful and beneficial.



Here's a simple technique called The Five Senses Exercise that you can use in almost any situation to boost your personal mindfulness:

1. List 5 things you can SEE in your immediate surroundings. Select something small or less obvious that you might not normally notice.

2. List 4 things you can FEEL right now, e.g. the wind on your face, the texture of your fingertips, the heat of the sun, etc.

3. List 3 things you can HEAR. This requires true listening—attuning your whole body to catch the most elusive sounds, e.g. a faint car horn, rustling leaves, the ticking of a clock, an air conditioner's hum, etc.

4. List 2 things you can SMELL. We often filter out smells as we go through our day—both good and bad. Focus on ALL the smells in your immediate area, e.g. air, plants, foods, pavement, mustiness, etc.

5. List something you can taste at this very moment. Open your mouth and see if the air itself has a taste. What does your mouth taste like – dry, your last meal or nothing at all?