

Mindfulness

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What is mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is an ancient eastern practice which is very relevant to our lives today.
- Despite originating in Buddhism, being mindful is a skill anyone can learn.
- Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:
 - on purpose
 - in the present moment
 - non-judgementally
- It involves giving your full attention to the present moment, for example what is happening in your body, your mind, or your surroundings.
- It describes a way of approaching our thoughts and feelings so that we are more aware of them, and can react differently to them.
- Every time we practise being mindful, we are exercising our attention 'muscle', allowing us to have more control over what we focus our attention on.
- "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf" (Kabat-Zinn 2004).

Seven core attitudes (Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

1. **Non-judging**
Stop labelling thoughts and feelings as good and bad
2. **Patience**
3. **Beginners Mind**
See things as new and fresh, with a sense of curiosity
4. **Trust**
5. **Non-Striving**
Not trying to get anywhere apart from where you are
6. **Acceptance**
Accept thoughts and feelings rather than avoiding them
7. **Letting be**
Love for yourself as you are, without self-blame or criticism

How can mindfulness help?

Mindfulness can help with:

- managing unhelpful thoughts
- developing more helpful responses to difficult feelings and events
- being kinder to yourself
- feeling calmer
- managing stress
- managing some physical health problems, like chronic pain
- studies have also shown that it can help manage mild depression, anxiety and other common mental health problems.

“Breathing in, I calm my body,
Breathing out, I smile
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.”

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Mindful activity

Automatic Pilot

- Sometimes in the car, we can be driving on ‘automatic pilot’, without being aware of what we are doing.
- Similarly, we may not actually be ‘present’ in our daily life. We may often be ‘miles away’ without being aware this is happening.
- On automatic pilot, events around us, thoughts, feelings and sensations, can trigger old thinking habits that can often be unhelpful and may lead to low mood.
- By becoming mindful and more aware of our thoughts, feelings and body sensations, we have more choice to not go into the same ‘mental ruts’ that may have caused problems in the past.

Mindfulness practise

- Any routine activity can become a routine practise of mindful activity.
- Washing the dishes can be a good example.
- When washing up, instead of being 'in our heads' and thinking about things we need to do, worrying about future events etc., use this time to be mindful.
- Notice the temperature of the water, how it feels on the skin and the texture of the bubbles.
- Listen to the sounds of the bubbles, how they softly pop.
- Notice what we may not normally notice.

Mindful walk

- A mindful walk brings new pleasures.
- Rather than 'being in our heads' when walking, we can look around and notice what we see, hear and sense.
- Notice the sensations in our own body, notice the movement of our feet, legs, arms and head.
- Notice our breathing.
- Thoughts may intrude, but we can just notice them, and bring our attention back to walking.
- The aim is to bring our attention back to the mindful activity (walking), noticing the thoughts, and bringing our focus back to walking.

Mindfulness Exercise (kabat-zinn 1996)

- Assume a comfortable posture lying on your back or sitting.
- Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.
- Bring attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.
- Keep your focus on the breathing, paying attention to each in-breath for its full duration, and each out-breath, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.
- Every time you notice your mind has wandered off the breath, notice what it was that took you away, and then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.
- If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your job is to simply bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.
- Practise this exercise for 15 minutes at a convenient time every day, whether you feel like it or not, for one week and see how it feels to incorporate a disciplined meditation practice into your life.
- Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to do anything.

Self-help resources / book recommendations

- Mindfulness a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world (Mark Williams and Danny Penman)
- How to Train a Wild Elephant: And Other Adventures in Mindfulness (Jan Chozen Bays)
- Happiness and How it Happens: Finding Contentment Through Mindfulness (The Happy Buddha)
- Mindfulness for Health: A practical guide to relieving pain, reducing stress and restoring wellbeing (Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman)
- One-Minute Mindfulness: How to live in the Moment (Simon Parke)
- Meditation classes in Leicester <http://meditateinleicester.org/classes-leicester-city-centre/>
- Headspace: Meditation and mindfulness made simple <https://www.headspace.com/>

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.