

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice like meditation or prayer. It involves paying attention to the present moment and accepting things for what they are without judgement.

Mindfulness improves..

Physical health

Research shows that there are many benefits of practising mindfulness including: feeling better about life, improved sleep, helping to manage chronic pain, lowering your blood pressure and improving digestion.

Well-being

Being mindful makes it easier to enjoy the happy moments in life as they occur, helps you to focus on doing things, and helps you cope with difficult events. By focusing on the 'here and now', many people who practice mindfulness find that they don't tend to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past. They feel better about themselves and find it easier to connect with others.

Mental health

In recent years, mindfulness practise has been used as an important part in treating problems like depression, anxiety, drug abuse and eating disorders.

Mindfulness Practise

There are many ways to practise mindfulness, but the goal of any mindfulness practise is to pay attention and be fully engaged in the present moment without judging it.

Here are some simple exercises to get you started.



Mindful breathing

This is as simple as just focusing on your breathing and can be done anywhere, at any time.

Try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Notice the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your chest. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute causes the breath to deepen and the mind to calm, allowing you to pause and be in the moment. It can be helpful to do this exercise lying in bed if you have difficulty sleeping.



Mindfulness

Here are some simple exercises to get you started.



Mindful walking

While walking, pay attention to the feel of the ground under your feet, as each part of the sole from heel to toe touches the ground. Observe what is around you as you walk, staying in the present. Let your other thoughts go. Notice the trees. The different shapes and heights. Notice their different colours, branches and leaves. Notice the sky, the colours, the movement of the clouds. Feel the wind, the temperature on your skin. Stay in the present, enjoying the moment.



Mindful eating

Turn off any distractions like the TV, computer, music or phone, sit down in a chair with your back straight.

When eating a meal pay full attention to each mouthful, how it looks, how it smells, the movements you use to raise it to your mouth, the texture and the taste as you chew slowly.

When eating a piece of chocolate close your eyes. Place the chocolate into your mouth and really savour it. Slow down and notice the texture, the taste, how it feels in your mouth. Let it linger and then swallow it.



Mindful listening

Try this first by just listening to the sounds around you. Pause and tune in to the present moment, and just listen. The birds outside, the car in the distance, the television in the next room.

You can also try listening to calming music. The idea is to listen intently without judgment. Don't think, hear.

Now try listening to another person. Research shows that the average person only remembers 25% of what someone has told them only a few minutes prior to being asked.

Give your full focus to the person talking. The goal of mindful listening is to stop your running thoughts so you can hear the message that is being shared with you. Let them know you are paying attention and thinking about what they have shared. Do this by showing interest through maintaining eye contact, nodding, smiling, and encouraging them to express their thoughts. Mindful listening means giving others the space to share without interrupting, advising, or correcting them. Reflect back to them what you heard. This tells them that you were really listening.

If you want some assistance practicing mindfulness, Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit organization that has developed a free app to help you practice mindfulness for just 10 minutes a day. <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>