

Mindfulness Exercises

Mindfulness Meditation

Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.

Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note and allow yourself to return to your breathing.

Sometimes you might feel frustrated and bored. That's fine – these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going and accept what's happening.

Whenever you are able to, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings or until you are ready to be done.

Body Scan

During the body scan exercise, you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body – to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again. Remember: move slowly and just pay attention.

Mindful Eating

Choose a food you would like to practice with (preferably something you can hold in your hand without getting messy). Something as simple as a single raisin will work well. Move slowly through these steps, taking a moment to focus on each one.

Before you pick your food, notice how it looks on the table in front of you. Notice its color, how the light reflects from its surface, and its size.

Now, pick up the food. Notice the weight and how the food feels against your skin. Roll the object between your fingers, or roll it in your hand, and notice its texture. Notice if it's smooth, rough, click, soft, firm, or if it has any other properties. Hold the food close to your nose and notice its smell.

Next, place the food in your mouth, on your tongue, but don't eat it. Notice how it feels in your mouth. Does the texture feel the same as on your hand? What do you taste? Roll the food around in your mouth and pay attention to the feeling.

Finally, begin to slowly chew your food. Notice how your teeth sink into it, and how the texture is different inside. Pay close attention to the flavor, and how it spreads across your tongue. Notice how your body changes – does your mouth fill with saliva? Does your tongue feel hot or cold? Continue to chew your food, paying close attention to the many sensations as you finish.

Five Senses

Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

What are 5 things you can see? Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of the room.

What are 4 things you can feel? Maybe you can feel the pressure on your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.

What are 3 things you can hear? Notice all of the background sounds you have been filtering out, such as air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant street.

What are 2 things you can smell? Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.

What is 1 thing you can taste? Pop a piece of gum into your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.

For More Information

University of Michigan Depression Center
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