

Essential Guide to Mindfulness

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You feel stressed and exhausted all the time. You are juggling your work, finances, and family. Your neck and shoulders are tense, and your mind is racing with thoughts.

You find yourself desperately trying to control every aspect of your life, so that you can settle some nervous energy. You are not alone. Although stress is a necessary part of life, negative stressors often overwhelm the body's ability to cope.

Long term negative stress can lead to anxiety, reduced performance, and mental and physical health issues. While we are leading more complex and productive lives today than our parents and grandparents, it comes at a cost.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified stressors, and added to the problem. What if there was a solution to help you better respond to stress? The answer lies in the

art of mindfulness practice that dates back thousands of years.

Mindfulness is a type of meditation that brings your attention to the present moment, without altering, or judging it. Although there are many types of meditation practices, they all can help to reduce stress, as well as relax your body and mind.

If you have never meditated before, don't worry. Follow these simple steps to bring mindfulness into your daily life. Learning anything new can be overwhelming. Take one of the steps (in any order) and practice it over one or two weeks until you feel like you have a good handle of it before moving to another step.

Remember, mindfulness is not a destination, it's a courageous journey. *Let's start!*

5 Key Steps to Becoming More Mindful:

Start in this Moment

Have you noticed that there never seems to be enough time or the "right" circumstances to start a mindfulness practice? Our constant "busy-ness" often keeps us distracted from taking the time to be present. You can start by stepping out of this pattern and creating the space for mindfulness in **THIS** present moment!

1

- *Begin with a Pause. This is an intentional momentary rest of your actions, thoughts, and patterns. This can include taking a breath, or imagining yourself "stepping back" from what is happening in front of you. Keeping this in mind, bring this pause throughout your day ..*
- *Bring your attention to whatever you are doing. A question I often use to deepen attention is "what do you notice?". As you brush your teeth in the morning, what do you notice? What do you notice when you're driving to the grocery store?*



Take one task this week to be a focus of your attention.

Be Kind and Compassionate Towards Yourself

2

We are often our worst critic. When we don't achieve certain goals, or meet the expectations of ourselves or others, we judge our own value and worth. Compassion is often described as the quivering of the heart in response to suffering. To be kind and compassionate to others, we have to start with kindness and compassion towards ourselves. You will notice that as you develop this skill, kindness and compassion extends outward into everything else that you do.

- *Tend to your inner self. As you notice your inner critic arising, notice how you respond to those words and how you feel. Acknowledge the harsh words, and set those aside. Imagine this were a child experiencing this suffering...how would you approach the child? Can you bring the same attention or response to yourself as you would to this child?*



Stay with the Breath

There is a misconception of what mindfulness meditation looks like...having an empty mind with no thoughts, being bathed in white light...Om.... The goal of mindfulness meditation is not to be free of thoughts or to be in constant meditation, but to allow the thoughts to be there without getting entangled in them. Our thoughts are often in the past and the future. We use the breath as an anchor to the present moment. The breath is right here, right now. It is readily accessible and always available.

- *Bring your attention to your breath. What do you notice? Is it shallow, is it deep? Is the inhalation longer or shorter than the exhalation? Notice your breath as it is, without changing it.*
- *Notice what happens as you observe your breath.*
- *Set aside 5 minutes of your day to be present with your breath*



3

Stay in the Body*

4

As we move through life at such a fast pace, we have never been more disconnected to ourselves and our bodies. Renowned authors and doctors Gabor Mate MD and Bessel van der Kolk MD, have written many books and published research to show how our bodies hold the memories for all of our experiences. Although disconnecting from our bodies can be the body's strategy to stay safe in times of fear and trauma, reconnecting to the body allows the movement of energy through these experiences. The goal in this process is to reconnect to the body in a curious way.

- *Start with a scan of your body. Notice the different sensations that arise.*
- *Notice the thoughts and stories that arise with these sensations, and let go of the stories.*
- *Be curious about the sensations, and just observe them*

*If you have had significant physical or emotional trauma, it may be difficult to be in your body. Please seek professional services in the field of trauma to guide and support you.



Practice Gratitude

5

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful. When you express gratitude, you shift your mindset from what you don't have to appreciating what you do have. The more you can see your abundance, the less you will grasp for more. The constant feeling of "not enough", and wanting bigger, and better, starts to dissipate as gratitude allows for things to be enough as they are.

- *Start a Gratitude Journal. Write 3 things down that you are grateful for each day. No need to spend too much time coming up with 3 things, just write whatever comes to mind. It can be as simple and profound as being grateful for a beautiful sunny day! The act of writing it down makes it "real". The more we live in the energy of gratitude, the more it takes form in our life.*



Like any skill, mindfulness requires training and practice. We can develop the mindfulness muscle through repetition. Include these key steps throughout your day, and mindfulness will become your new habit of responding.

If you need guidance, or would like explore these topics in more detail, or are curious in how to apply these principles to other aspects of your health, a member of our clinic team would be happy to help.



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**Book a discovery call now
to see how we can help**