

# How to Practice Mindfulness: Practical Steps and Tips

Have you ever wanted to bring more mindfulness into your life, but struggle to make time in your chaotic schedule?

Or do you set the intention to go about your day more mindfully, only to fall into the trap of snacking unconsciously or responding to emails on autopilot?

It's not easy in the beginning, and there will be bumps along the path toward a committed mindfulness practice.

This article will guide you through various ways and resources to help introduce mindfulness in your life so that you are well prepared to start your journey.

## How to Begin Practicing Mindfulness

At its core, mindfulness is an activity that needs to be practiced regularly and with intention. With these cornerstones in mind, let's consider a few ways to introduce mindfulness into our daily lives.

### Start with a daily routine

The first step is to introduce a daily routine. Like any exercise, mindfulness benefits from regular practice. Researchers often use a mindfulness intervention plan that takes place across many weeks (Mackenzie, Poulin, & Seidman-Carlson, 2006; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010).

Decide on an uninterrupted time of day that you can set aside to practice mindfulness, and keep that time in your schedule.

Mindfulness is a way of perceiving, thinking, and behaving. You would be forgiven for thinking that mindfulness is just an activity; in fact, mindfulness is a way of perceiving and observing, and it can be developed using various tools. Some of these tools include meditation, exercises, and breathing.

### **Commit, commit, commit**

The most important step before embarking on this journey is to commit to it. Some meta-analyses have highlighted varying effects for mindfulness interventions, and the authors posit that this might be because the participants are not engaging in their mindfulness homework exercises or engaging for too short a period to see results (Khoury et al., 2013).

Knowing this, before you begin, you have to commit. Next, we'll explore why you should start a mindfulness routine and how to live a mindful daily life.

### **5 Reasons to Start Practicing Mindfulness Today**

At this point, you might think that mindfulness sounds like it requires a lot of effort.

Beginning a mindfulness habit is work, and it will be difficult in the beginning, but this habit will become easier over time and with more practice.

Additionally, mindfulness has numerous positive benefits (Davis & Hayes, 2011). The benefits of mindfulness are emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, professional, and practical.

### **Emotional benefits**

Regular mindfulness meditation results in reduced depressive symptoms, negative affect, and rumination. Rumination is persistent worrying about the following:

- Past events
- Negative emotions
- The causes and consequences of these emotions
- Rumination is often linked to increased depression and anxiety

The positive effects of mindfulness at reducing negative affect and other conditions like depression and anxiety are not limited to only one study.

These results suggest that therapeutic interventions based on mindfulness are not only successful for clinical populations, but the benefits extend to nonclinical populations.

### **Cognitive benefits**

Practitioners of mindfulness have better working memory than nonpractitioners (Chambers et al., 2008; Corcoran, Farb, Anderson, & Segal, 2010), which allows for better emotional regulation.

Participants also report that their attention improves significantly after regular mindful meditation compared to before they began mindful meditation (Chambers et al., 2008).

There is also some laboratory evidence that suggests that people who have a longer mindfulness habit are better at ignoring emotional distractions than people whose mindfulness habit is shorter and those who do not practice at all (Pavlov et al., 2015).

These results suggest that the benefits of mindfulness are cumulative and will continue to improve over time.

### **Interpersonal benefits**

The benefits of mindfulness flow to other spheres of life, including relationships.

There is some evidence that regular mindfulness practice can improve relationship satisfaction and communication through a variety of paths, specifically:

- Responding to relationship stress in a positive way
- Better identification of one's own emotions
- Better communication of one's own emotions
- Better conflict resolution
- Improved empathy
- Professional benefits

It should come as no surprise that the benefits of mindfulness are not limited to interpersonal relationships. For example, the ability to communicate clearly and respond more effectively to stressful situations should translate from personal to professional contexts (Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leyson, & Dewulf, 2008).

Employees who practice regular mindful activities experienced higher job satisfaction and lower job stress than a control group who did not participate (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2012).

## **Practical reasons for practicing mindfulness**

The final reason to practice mindfulness is a practical one. Methods to improve mindfulness are often easy and inexpensive. The only 'cost' is that of time and effort.

## **Steps for a Mindful Daily Life**

Although mindfulness is fostered through regular practice, it is also extremely important to try to incorporate mindfulness into all aspects of your life.

It can be difficult, but we've made a list of steps to help:

### **Make the time**

Set aside time each day that you can formally practice mindfulness. Ideally, this daily slot should occur at the same time each day and for the same duration so that it becomes a habit.

Studies that have used a mindfulness intervention have done so over several weeks, with one or two sessions each day. Sometimes interventions are only five days a week, and sometimes they are six days a week. The length of each session varies between 10 minutes and 45 minutes.

### **Perform an exercise**

During the time that you have set aside, perform one of the following exercises: a body scan, deep breathing, or mindful meditation.

**Body scan:** During the body scan exercise, try to focus inwardly on your body and the way that it feels. Your task is to develop an awareness of sensations in your body. Breathe deeply, and remain aware of your bodily sensations without trying to change them.

### **Three-minute breathing**

During this exercise, the participant is guided through three points where they become aware, focus their attention on their breathing, and extend their attention. Focusing on one's breath is meant to act as an anchor.

### **Mindful stretching**

For this exercise, start by following one of the mindful stretching videos listed below. While in the stretch, focus on your breathing, and think about how your body feels. Try to focus only on the activity of stretching and avoid other distracting thoughts.

### **Mindful breathing while focusing on your breath**

Sit somewhere quiet in a seated position. While seated, focus on your breathing. Inhale deeply for three seconds and slowly exhale for three seconds. Use your breath as your anchor; when you find your thoughts wandering, come back to your breath and inhale deeply for three seconds, followed by a deep exhalation for three seconds. In many exercises, the time limit for this exercise is three minutes.

### **Mindful meditation**

This is a particular type of meditation where you learn how to practice mindfulness. During this type of meditation, you will be seated for 10–30 minutes and practice focusing on only your breathing. This is very similar to the previous two exercises, except that your body is not moving, and the time is longer.

### **Act mindfully**

Choose one activity during the day that you will perform in a mindful way, that is, with complete awareness. The best type of activity is one that would usually be done automatically; for example, driving, showering, cooking, eating, exercising, or walking. Here is an example of how to act mindfully while eating.

### **Mindful eating**

When you take your lunch break, practice mindful eating. Do not rush through your lunch so that you can get back to your desk. Instead, take the time to enjoy your lunch. Focus on the texture of your meal, the effort that went into making it, and the flavors of the food in your mouth.