

## Easy Everyday Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the mental state you can achieve by focusing your full awareness on the present moment, it's about paying attention on purpose, at the same time acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, whether they are good or bad. We often don't know how to pay wise attention to what we're doing, when we're doing one thing we are thinking of the next, then thinking of what else we need to do, all while we try to catch up on email, Facebook, and Twitter. This sort of frantic lifestyle means we often miss out on meaningful moments, our mind is dashing ahead, and we are caught in over-doing and over-thinking. This negatively affects our well-being, it can make us feel exhausted, low in mood, and anxious.

Here are two quick and easy techniques, which you can use throughout the day to get a take a break, and feel calmer.

### 1. Mindful Breathing

You can use this technique wherever you are, whether you are sat at work, on a train, or lying in bed. You can use mindful breathing once a day, or several times a day. The technique is about noticing, paying attention, and really being aware of your breathing. This technique gives you a simple way of having a more mindful and conscious awareness of your body, its breathing, and its ability to relax. Read through this description before you start to practice the technique. Aim to do this exercise initially for 5 minutes, building up to 10 minutes, or more if you like. When you initially start out, using a timer might be helpful, just make sure the alert sound is not too loud or intrusive.

Start by sitting comfortably and quietly in a chair with your feet flat on the ground and your hands placed softly in your lap. Focus all your attention on the physical act of breathing, closing your eyes will help you focus. Start by noticing your breath as it enters your body through your nose, travels to your lungs, before leaving through your mouth. Notice how your lungs fill up on the in breath, and how they deflate when you exhale. Notice how your diaphragm and stomach expand, and relax with your breathing. Take note of your inward and outward breath, the sound it makes, the temperature of the air as it enters and leaves your body, cool or warm. It doesn't matter if your breathing is slow or fast, deep or shallow, let it be what it is, and let your body become naturally relaxed. As you relax, you might notice yourself taking slower longer and deeper breaths. Really focus on the physical sensations of breathing in and breathing out. It's perfectly okay if you find yourself distracted by thoughts. Don't get worried about thoughts entering your mind, allow them to just be there, and gently keep bringing your awareness back to your breath. Keep your attention on your breathing and your body, noticing how the breathing relaxes your muscles.

### 2. Mindfulness of Thoughts & Feelings

This technique is helpful when you are experiencing a particular emotion, whether it's mild, moderate, or intense. Again this technique can be used in any situation, while you're working, walking, or taking a break. The idea is that you allow yourself to simply notice the emotions you are experiencing, and pay attention to them. Tuning into our emotions can feel a bit strange, since most of us get on with life by avoiding and denying them, hence why we react instead of think with full awareness about a situation. The reason we react is because it helps us avoid painful feelings, because we somehow come

to think of feelings as being dangerous, they are to be avoided, and run away from. Using this technique instead of suppressing and repressing you will learn to see emotional challenges as a normal part of life, rather than a frightening thing. This doesn't mean you have to like the situation you're in, but it does mean that you are dropping your mental resistance to what is happening, by not reacting, but simply being aware of your experience. Recognising and acknowledging your feelings in this way opens up inner mental space, and brings you into full contact with yourself, and the reality of the present moment.

Begin by trying to notice where in your body you feel the emotion is located, is it your head, throat, chest, stomach, abdomen, gut? Pay attention to any physical sensations or tension you feel anywhere in your body, as a result of the emotion. It can be helpful to name your emotions, for instance saying to yourself:

"I am feeling stressed"  
"I am feeling overwhelmed"  
"I am feeling worried/scared"  
"I am feeling angry"

If you can't name what you are feeling that is fine, just continue to be aware of the feeling you have. Focus on what the emotion is making you feel like physically, be it dizzy, nauseous, tense, calm, or relaxed. Notice any thoughts that come with the emotions, just be aware of them, without needing to solve them in that moment. Remind yourself that thoughts are not facts, they are simply your perception in a given moment, and like emotions they are not permanent. Allow yourself to just sit with the emotions you are feeling, and how they affect what your thoughts are. As your awareness increases, notice your breath, whether it is shallow, or deep. As you relax into your emotion express a mental curiosity about the situation you are experiencing, by asking yourself:

"Why am I feeling like this?"  
"What happened before I started to feel like I do?"  
"Are there any physical factors affecting how I feel, tiredness, hunger, thirst?"

Notice how the intensity of your emotion has changed from when you started this mindfulness technique to now. Start to think of something that you will find helpful to do before you stop your mindful moment, decide what you will proceed to do. Whether that's making a cup of tea, or talking to a colleague/friend. Ask yourself:

"What do I really need right now?"  
"What things can I do to nurture and support myself when I end this mindful moment?"

Ongoing practice of this technique can lead you towards a wiser relationship with your emotions and your thoughts, making you more able to choose a conscious response to situations. You may find that this technique sometimes also resolves or dissolves the emotion completely, although this is not the goal of the exercise. The goal is for you to come to see that it doesn't matter how intense and painful the emotional storm, there is a part of you that can be peaceful and still in the middle of it all.

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