

BE MINDFFUL



The practise of being present

KRUSHA PATEL

BE MINDFUL WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. While mindfulness is something we all naturally possess, it's more readily available to us when we practice on a daily basis. Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful. And there's growing research showing that when you train your brain to be mindful, you're actually remodelling the physical structure of your brain.

It can be easy to rush through life without stopping to notice much. Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your mental wellbeing. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better. You can take steps to develop it in your own life.

Professor Mark Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, says that mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment.

"It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living 'in our heads' – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour," he says.

"An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment. That might be something as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs.

"Another important part of mindfulness is an awareness of our thoughts and feelings as they happen moment to moment."It's about allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives."

BE MINDFUL HOW MINDFULNESS HELPS MENTAL WELLBEING

Becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better.

When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience afresh things that we have been taking for granted.

"Mindfulness also allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and feelings that we experience," says Professor Williams, "and to see how we can become entangled in that stream in ways that are not helpful.

"This lets us stand back from our thoughts and start to see their patterns. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply 'mental events' that do not have to control us.

"Most of us have issues that we find hard to let go and mindfulness can help us deal with them more productively. We can ask: 'Is trying to solve this by brooding about it helpful, or am I just getting caught up in my thoughts?'

Most people practise mindfulness through the process of meditation. As it allows one to be present and notice the small things about their body. Shifts in their breathing and thoughts and feelings in the current present moment.

BE MINDFUL HOW DO I PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION?

What is meditation?

Meditation is exploring. It's not a fixed destination. Your head doesn't become vacuumed free of thought, utterly undistracted. It's a special place where each and every moment is momentous. When we meditate we venture into the workings of our minds: our sensations (air blowing on our skin or a harsh smell wafting into the room), our emotions (love this, hate that, crave this, loathe that) and thoughts (wouldn't it be weird to see an elephant playing a trumpet). Mindfulness meditation asks us to suspend judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching our experience with warmth and kindness, to ourselves and others.

How do I practice mindfulness and meditation?

Mindfulness is available to us in every moment, whether through meditations and body scans, or mindful moment practices like taking time to pause and breathe when the phone rings instead of rushing to answer it.

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness.

Notice the everyday

"Even as we go about our daily lives, we can notice the sensations of things, the food we eat, the air moving past the body as we walk," says Professor Williams. "All this may sound very small, but it has huge power to interrupt the 'autopilot' mode we often engage day to day, and to give us new perspectives on life."

Keep it regular

It can be helpful to pick a regular time – the morning journey to work or a walk at lunchtime – during which you decide to be aware of the sensations created by the world around you.

Try something new

Trying new things, such as sitting in a different seat in meetings or going somewhere new for lunch, can also help you notice the world in a new way.

BE MINDFUL HOW DO I PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION?

Watch your thoughts

"Some people find it very difficult to practice mindfulness. As soon as they stop what they're doing, lots of thoughts and worries crowd in," says Professor Williams.

"It might be useful to remember that mindfulness isn't about making these thoughts go away, but rather about seeing them as mental events."

Imagine standing at a bus station and seeing 'thought buses' coming and going without having to get on them and be taken away. This can be very hard at first, but with gentle persistence it is possible." Some people find that it is easier to cope with an over-busy mind if they are doing gentle yoga or walking."

Name thoughts and feelings

To develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings, some people find it helpful to silently name them: "Here's the thought that I might fail that exam". Or, "This is anxiety".

Free yourself from the past and future

You can practise mindfulness anywhere, but it can be especially helpful to take a mindful approach if you realise that, for several minutes, you have been "trapped" in reliving past problems or "pre-living" future worries.

BE MINDFUL

THE BASICS OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Mindfulness helps us put some space between ourselves and our reactions, breaking down our conditioned responses. Here's how to tune into mindfulness throughout the day:

1. Set aside some time. You don't need a meditation cushion or bench, or any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills—but you do need to set aside some time and space.



2. Observe the present moment as it is. The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind, or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we're aiming to pay attention to the present moment, without judgment. Easier said than done, we know.



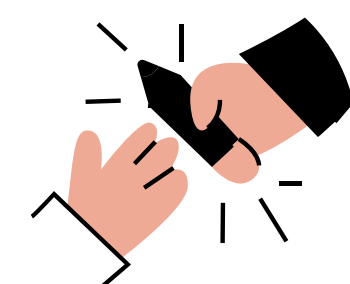
3. Let your judgments roll by. When we notice judgments arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.



4. Return to observing the present moment as it is. Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.



5. Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.



That's the practice. It's often been said that it's very simple, but it's not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it. Results will accrue.

BE MINDFUL

HOW TO MEDITATE

This meditation focuses on the breath, not because there is anything special about it, but because the physical sensation of breathing is always there and you can use it as an anchor to the present moment. Throughout the practice you may find yourself caught up in thoughts, emotions, sounds wherever your mind goes, simply come back again to the next breath. Even if you only come back once, that's okay.

A simple Meditation Practise:

1. Sit comfortably. Find a spot that gives you a stable, solid, comfortable seat.



2. Notice what your legs are doing. If on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. If on a chair, rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor.



3. Straighten your upper body—but don't stiffen. Your spine has natural curvature. Let it be there.



4. Notice what your arms are doing. Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs wherever it feels most natural.



5. Soften your gaze. Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. It's not necessary to close your eyes. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.



6. Feel your breath. Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing: the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest.



7. Notice when your mind wanders from your breath. Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. Don't worry. There's no need to block or eliminate thinking. When you notice your mind wandering gently return your attention to the breath.



8. Be kind about your wandering mind. You may find your mind wandering constantly—that's normal, too. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, practice observing them without reacting. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that's all there is. Come back to your breath over and over again, without judgment or expectation.



When you're ready, gently lift your gaze (if your eyes are closed, open them). Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.

BE MINDFUL

FACTS ABOUT MINDFULNESS

The Benefits

When we meditate it doesn't help to fixate on the benefits, but rather to just do the practice, and yet there are benefits or no one would do it. When we're mindful, we reduce stress, enhance performance, gain insight and awareness through observing our own mind, and increase our attention to others' well-being. Mindfulness meditation gives us a time in our lives when we can suspend judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind, approaching our experience with warmth and kindness—to ourselves and others.

Facts

- **Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic.** It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names.
- **Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do.** We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are. But we can cultivate these innate qualities with simple practices that are scientifically demonstrated to benefit ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and neighbours, the people we work with, and the institutions and organizations we take part in
- **You don't need to change.** Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we're not have failed us over and over again. Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.
- **Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon.** Here's why:
- **Anyone can do it.** Mindfulness practice cultivates universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs. Everyone can benefit and it's easy to learn.
- **It's a way of living.** Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little makes our lives better.
- **It's evidence-based.** We don't have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- **It sparks innovation.** As we deal with our world's increasing complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly intransigent problems.

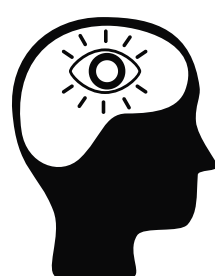
BE MINDFUL FACTS ABOUT MINDFULNES

Regular practice of mindfulness meditation has benefits for your physical as well as your mental health, including playing a role in the management of anxiety, stress, depression, sleep disorders, relationship issues, and eating disorders. Can Mindfulness Relieve More Than Stress?

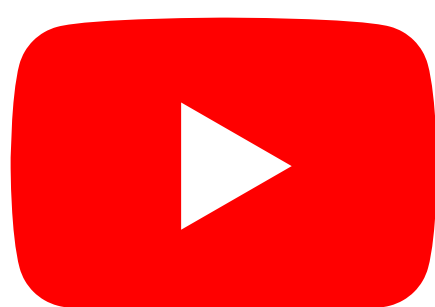
How Long and Often Should I Practice?

The goal is to make mindfulness meditation a regular practice, which doesn't necessarily mean that you need to do it every day. Studies have found that meditating three to four times per week can have big benefits and, regularly meditating for 8 weeks will actually alter the brain, according to neuroimaging studies.¹ While some people meditate for longer sessions, even a few minutes every day can make a difference.

Begin with a short, 5-minute mediation session and increase your sessions by 10 or 15 minutes until you are comfortable meditating for 30 minutes at a time.



Click [here](#) for [Free Headspace](#)
meditation



WWW.KRUSHAPATEL.CO.UK