

Mindfulness is a very simple form of meditation.

A typical meditation consists of **focusing your full attention on your breath** as it flows in and out of your body. Focusing on each breath in this way allows you to observe your thoughts as they arise in your mind and, little by little, to let go of struggling with them.

You come to realise that **thoughts come and go** of their own accord; that you are not your thoughts. You can watch as they appear in your mind, seemingly from thin air, and watch again as they disappear, like a soap bubble bursting.

You come to the understanding that **thoughts and feelings** (including negative ones) **are temporary**. They come and they go, and ultimately, you have a choice about whether to act on them or not.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about **observation without criticism**; being compassionate with yourself.

When unhappiness or stress hover overhead, rather than taking it all personally, you learn to treat them as if they were black clouds in the sky, and to observe them with friendly curiosity as they drift past.

In essence, mindfulness allows you to catch negative thought patterns before they tip you into a downward spiral. It begins the process of putting you back in control of your life.



Over time, mindfulness brings about long-term changes in mood and levels of happiness and wellbeing. Scientific studies have shown that mindfulness not only prevents depression, but that it also positively affects the brain patterns underlying day-to-day anxiety, stress, depression and irritability so that when they arise, they dissolve away again more easily.

Meditation is not a religion. Mindfulness is simply a method of mental training.

Mindfulness practice does not take a lot of time, although some patience and persistence are required. Many people soon find that meditation liberates them from the pressures of time, so they have more of it to spend on other things.

You don't have to sit cross-legged on the floor (like the pictures you may have seen in magazines or on TV), but you can if you want to. You can sit on chairs to meditate, but you can also practise bringing mindful awareness to whatever you are doing, on buses, trains or while walking to work. You can meditate more or less anywhere.

Easy mindfulness activities you can do at home

CHOCOLATE



Take a piece of chocolate and pay careful attention to:

- The way the chocolate looks
- How it feels
- Its smell
- How it feels as it starts to melt in your mouth
- How it tastes

Focusing on the single object of the piece of chocolate is meant to bring **your mind** to the present, to what is right in front of you.

“By focusing on the chocolate in your hand and making a point to notice everything about it, you are unlikely to be expending energy, time and attention on worrying or deliberating about other parts of your life”

A Mindful S.N.A.C.K.

The next time you're feeling stressed out, overwhelmed, or unsure, reach for a moment of calm awareness: a mindfulness SNACK. Here's how to do it:

S

Stop

Just stop whatever you're doing. (Stopping, by definition, requires us to begin again. We can always begin again.)

N

Notice

What is happening within and around you?

A

Accept

This is a tricky one. Whatever it is you're struggling with (time, kids, sleepiness, frustration) acknowledge it for what it is, without judgment.

C

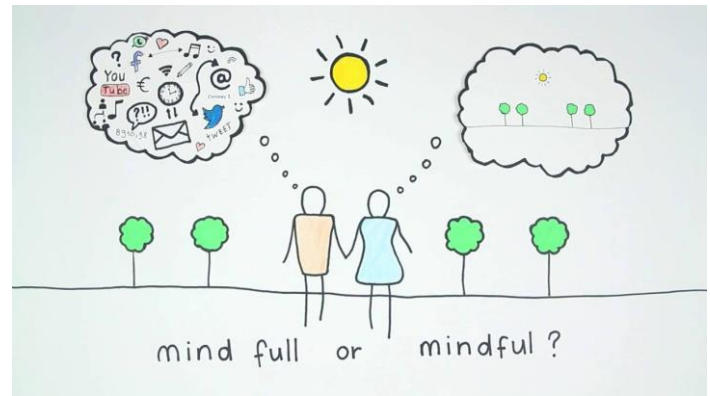
Curious

Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment: What am I feeling? What do I need right now?

K

Kindness

Respond to yourself and others (mistakes and all) with kindness and observe how that helps things get back on track.



Five Senses Exercise

- Notice five things that you can **see**.

Look around you and bring your attention to five things that you can see. Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.

- Notice four things that you can **feel**.

Bring awareness to four things that you are currently feeling, like the texture of your pants, the feeling of the breeze on your skin, or the smooth surface of a table you are resting your hands on.

- Notice three things you can **hear**.

Take a moment to listen, and note three things that you hear in the background. This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator, or the faint sounds of traffic from a nearby road.

- Notice two things you can **smell**.

Bring your awareness to smells that you usually filter out, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying a whiff of pine trees if you're outside or the smell of a fast food restaurant across the street.

- Notice one thing you can **taste**.

Focus on one thing that you can taste right now, in this moment. You can take a sip of a drink of, eat something, or take a piece of chewing gum.