



Part 3 - Mindfulness

In our busy lives we are often juggling many different tasks. Often thinking about what we have got to do or what we have already done, and we may lose connection with the present moment.



When we are doing a familiar task that we have done several times e.g. cleaning, driving, washing dishes, or reading, our mind is often not concentrating on what we are doing but instead thinking about something else. This could be worrying, thinking about negative thoughts, or thinking about many things at once. This happens because once we have done a task several times our brain stores a memory of how to do the task. The task can then be done 'automatically', allowing space to think about other things.



Mindfulness is about being present and fully engaged in where we are and what we are doing, without distractions. Being aware of our thoughts and feelings but not getting caught up or being distracted by them.

Mindfulness focuses on being in the "here and now" rather than our mind running away, thinking about the past or the future. So, if we are for example brushing our teeth, mindfulness involves focussing fully on that task, rather than thinking or worrying about other things.



Mindfulness is a technique/skill that can help to reduce the intensity of difficult emotions or thoughts we are experiencing, by allowing our brain to refocus its attention on what is going on around us, at that present moment.

Research has found that Mindfulness can have lots of benefits and is a technique used widely to support well-being. It has been found to:

- Reduce stress
- Increase capacity to deal with life's challenges
- Fully engage in activities
- Lower blood pressure
- Manage chronic pain
- Improve sleep



In this uncertain time, it can be easy to start worrying about the future or thinking about the past and the things we can't do, or the people we can't see at the moment. So, Mindfulness can help us through this, by focussing on the present and what we have to do right now.

The good thing about Mindfulness is that it's available to us in every moment, like taking time to pause and breathe before rushing to answer the phone.

However, like any new skill, Mindfulness needs to be practiced. Initially, learning to be mindful may be practiced in a restful, quiet moment and then it can be applied to any activity we may undertake.

practice
practice
practice

Basic Mindfulness

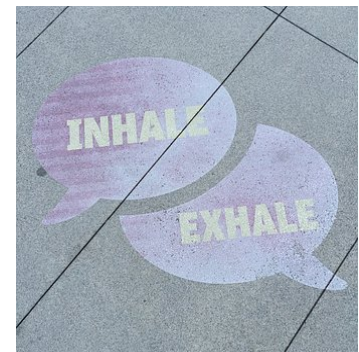


- ✓ Sit comfortably
- ✓ Rest your feet on the floor/stool
- ✓ Straighten your upper body but don't stiffen, just go with the natural curves of your body
- ✓ Rest your arms where they feel most natural
- ✓ Soften your gaze downwards
- ✓ Feel the breath in and the breath out
- ✓ Notice when your mind wanders, then gently bring it back to the breath. Just be kind to yourself when the mind wanders, bringing it gently back to the breath.
- ✓ When ready gently lift your gaze

Mindfulness Exercises

1. Focus on breathing:

- ❖ Get into a comfortable posture by either sitting down or lying down. You may close your eyes.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your stomach, pay attention to how it rises and expands as you breathe in and how it falls with the out breath. You may put your hands on your stomach to feel the belly rise and fall.
- ❖ Keep your awareness on your breathing, focusing on how it feels to breathe in and out, following the breath. The cool of the air through the nostrils, the warmth of the air as you breathe out. You may count the in-breath in and out-breath out.
- ❖ If you notice your mind wanders tell yourself it's ok and bring it back to the breath. Your mind might wander many times, each time it does bring it back to the breath. Practice this activity as many times during the day as you wish, it helps you to become aware of the breath without having to do anything.



2. Focus on your senses:

a. Sight

Focus on one item you see in front of you e.g. inside the house; item of furniture, ornament, toy or outside; trees, houses, the road, pavement, a flower.

- Be aware of the colours: are they bright, dull, dark, light, different tones?
- Are there different shapes, is it smooth, rough, sharp?
- What are the different patterns and details?
- Does the light reflect off the item?



When you become aware of any judgements or your mind wanders 'off on a tangent', just gently bring it back to the item.

b. Hearing

Focus on one sound you can hear.



- Is it loud or quiet?
- Is it continuous or does it come and go?
- Is it louder at certain points and quieter at certain points?
- Be aware of the different pitch and tones.

If the mind wanders just gently bring it back to the sound, breathing easily and gently.

c. Smell

Focus on one smell, e.g. from a flower, perfume, bubble bath.

- Is it strong or weak?
- Is it continuously there or does it come and go?
- Are there different scents within the smell?
- Does it cause different sensations in your nose?



If it brings back memories or thoughts just bring your awareness back to the scent.

d. Touch

Focus on one thing you can feel e.g. an item, piece of clothing, a leaf, fir cone, your clothes against your skin.



- What is the texture like? Notice where the textures change.
- Is it soft, hard, bumpy, smooth, rough, curved, pointy?
- Is it warm, cold?

If the mind starts thinking of other things just gently bring it back to the object and how it feels to the touch.

e. Taste

Focus on one thing you can taste.



- Is it sweet or bitter?
- Is it crunchy or soft?
- What is the texture like; smooth, rough, bumpy?
- Is it warm or cold?

When the mind wanders, that's ok, just bring it back to the taste.

Mindful activity:

How many times have we taken part in an activity that is routine and rather than focusing on the activity we end up being in our head? Activities like washing the dishes, cleaning, cooking, driving, walking, and gardening. Because we have so much in our heads, we start thinking about what we have done in the day, worrying about the future or thinking about the past.



Instead let us put all that we have learnt about focussing on our senses to help us be mindful with an activity.

- ❖ If you are washing the dishes focus on the temperature of the water, how the dishes feel, the texture of washing up liquid and the sponge.



- ❖ If you are cleaning focus on what the surfaces look like, what you see on the surfaces, what the cloth you are using feels like.
- ❖ If you are driving focus on the touch of the steering wheel, the colour of the car in front. the sounds outside.

- ❖ If you are in the garden focus on what is around you, what colour leaves do trees have, what tone of green is the grass, can you hear any sounds (birds singing, the wind, distant conversations), what does the sun or wind feel like against your skin.
- ❖ If you are doing any exercises, perhaps one of the DSAuk workouts, focus on your body, the stretch in the muscles, warmth in the skin, breath in and out, different sensations in the body as it moves.



Whilst practicing being mindful your mind will drift and that is natural, all you can do is recognise it is and gently bring it back.

Mindful Eating



How many times have we eaten a meal; sitting in front of the telly, at the laptop whilst working, on the games console, whilst driving...and not really paid any attention to what we are eating. (If we did pay more attention, I wonder how many of us would eat more naturally and healthily!).

We can practice mindfulness whilst eating.

- ❖ Sit up straight at a table or with the meal on your lap.
- ❖ Be aware of your breathing and the gentle breath in and out.
- ❖ Lower your gaze to the meal in front of you.
- ❖ What does it look like? Is the plate patterned. Notice the different colours, textures, shapes of the food. If it's warm....is there steam rising?
- ❖ As you take hold of the knife and fork, notice the shine, reflections. Are they heavy, smooth, cool to the touch?
- ❖ What do you see/hear/smell when you cut the food?

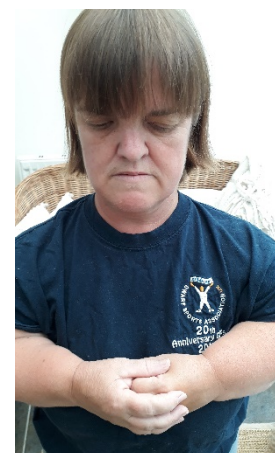


- ❖ As you bring the food to your mouth. Does the smell become stronger? Notice the different sensations in your body.
- ❖ As the food touches your lips and into your mouth. Is it soft or hard, is it crunchy? Is it hot or cold?
- ❖ As the tongue moves the food and your teeth begin to chew. What flavours are released. Is it sweet, bitter, sharp?
- ❖ Notice the different sensations in your mouth and throat as you swallow the food.
- ❖ If your mind wanders bring it back to the senses and the sensations of the food.

Walking mindfulness

We can even be mindful when we are mobile!

- ❖ Stand up straight and comfortable for your body. Try not to be stiff. Distribute your weight easily and feel your feet touching the ground.
- ❖ Curl the thumb of left hand in and gently curl fingers around it.
- ❖ Bring your arm and hand against your body, where it is comfortable. Wrap your right hand around your left and gently rest your right thumb in the dip between your left thumb and index finger as Donna is demonstrating in the photo. (If this does not feel comfortable just lower your arms by your side).
- ❖ Drop your gaze slightly (but so you can still see where you are walking!)
- ❖ Take a step out with your left foot, feel the stretch in the muscles, feel the swing of the foot. Notice the heel touch the ground, then the ball of your foot and finally the toe.
- ❖ Feel the same on the right foot
- ❖ Walk at a steady pace.
- ❖ If the mind wanders just bring it back to the sensations of your feet touching the ground



Wheelchair Mindfulness

- ❖ Sit up straight and comfortable in the chair, allowing the breath to flow easily in your body. Distributing your weight evenly on the seat.
- ❖ Allow your feet to rest gently on the footplates.
- ❖ If in a manual wheelchair relax your arms and hands onto the wheels as required. If in an electric chair relax your arm and hand on to the controls. Allow your other arm to be still on the chair arm or on your lap.
- ❖ Drop your gaze slightly (but so you can still see where you are going!)
- ❖ As you move forwards notice the sensation of the chair as it moves over different surfaces of grass, concrete. What does this feel like in the body? The different sensations as the gradient changes. Notice the sounds of the chair as it moves and the wheels on the different surfaces ...is it crunchy, rattling?
- ❖ If the mind wanders just bring it back to the sounds and sensations in your body.
- ❖ Those of you with Segways, see if you can try moving mindfully as above.... but don't go through puddles!

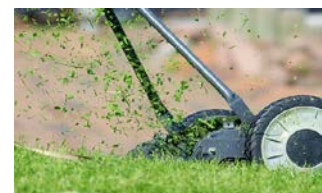


Mindfully Mobile



Allow your senses to widen, be 'Mindfully Mobile' when you are out and about.

- ❖ Bring your gaze upwards. What can you see? What colour doors do houses have, can you see trees or shops.
- ❖ What sounds can you hear? Birds singing, motorbikes, people talking, dogs barking.
- ❖ Notice the different smells. Cut grass, rain on the pavement, food cooking.
- ❖ What can you feel? Put your hand out to touch a wall. Is it rough? Feel the wind on your face and the warmth of the sun.



Children and Mindfulness

Mindfulness is great with children and teens. It can help them to relax, concentrate and enjoy the activity they are up to at that present moment.



All the exercises above can be adapted for different age groups and there are many ideas on the internet for Mindfulness with children.

A particular book I like to use for children (and myself) is:

Sitting Still Like A Frog. Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (And Their Parents) by Eline Snel.
Available on Amazon.



Dwarf Sports Association UK Mental Health and Wellbeing



There are lots of activities, resources, and apps for Mindfulness:

Activities for Mindfulness

- ❖ Try a Mindfulness Colouring Book.
- ❖ Any hobby or craft is fabulous to support mindfulness.
- ❖ Listening to music mindfully



Resources online:

<https://themindedinstitute.com/free-online-practices/>

- free mindful practices delivered through webinars

<https://getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm>

- explains mindfulness and different techniques

Apps for Mindfulness:

The '**Headspace**' app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus. The app also has a handy "get some headspace" reminder to encourage you to keep practicing each day.'

'**Smiling mind**' is a way to practice daily mindfulness exercises from any device. Smiling Mind is a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life. This is really helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.'

Enjoy being Mindful!

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