

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is the ability to maintain a real-time, moment by moment awareness of our thoughts and emotions, our body's reaction to stress and the environment, and an overall awareness of our health and mental health.

This helps us to focus on the present moment, and avoid being preoccupied with past events or fears for the future. By concentrating on the things and people around us and the present moment, we will reduce stress and improve our outlook on the world.

Benefits of Mindfulness

We can spend so much time and energy thinking and overthinking past events in our lives or worrying about the future that we forget to appreciate and enjoy our lives in the here-and-now.

Mindfulness can help clear your head, become more self-aware, slow down your thoughts, help you to concentrate, slow down your nervous system, better relax and unwind in your spare time, improve your sleep and reduce your stress levels both at work and at home.

This will improve the quality time you spend with friends and family.

Mindfulness for Sleep

Sleep is an important restorative process for both the body and the mind. Getting a good night's sleep, every night, will improve your overall wellbeing, your performance at work, and your energy and enthusiasm during your downtime. Follow these steps for a pre-sleep mindfulness routine that will help you prepare for a good night's sleep and put you in the best position to start the next day:

1. Dim the lights 1 hour before bedtime.

Start winding down your body and your brain by dimming the lights. If your ceiling lights don't have a dimmer, use table or floor lamps fitted with a warm, lower wattage globes. Engage in relaxing activities outside your bedroom that pass the time quietly.

2. Avoid looking at anything with a screen.

Stow away your smartphone, your tablet or your laptop and don't watch TV right up until bedtime. The white and blue backlighting used to illuminate these devices' screens wreaks havoc on your brain's perception of time. It keeps you wide awake and alert when you should be slowing down and relaxing.

3. Practice a focused mindfulness exercise ten minutes before bedtime.

Sit in a comfortable chair in the same dimly lit room. Imagine the outline of your body and slowly trace it in your mind's eye. Keep in mind the amount of pressure you're feeling against the chair or the ground and be mindful of where there's more pressure and where there's less. Start with your head. Is it touching the back of the chair? How heavy does it feel against the chair, the wall or just the air? Then slowly move down to your ear, your shoulder, your arm and finally your leg. Work down to your feet and then slowly back up the other side of your body. Spend five minutes thinking about your body and the space it occupies.

4. If your mind begins to wander, notice that it wandered and then get back on track.

Try to avoid judging yourself. Your mind will wander, but the real skill lies in getting it back on track.

5. Get in to bed and focus on your breath.

If you are unable to get to sleep, get up, sit in the comfortable chair and repeat the exercise. Don't go back to bed until you're sleepy.



MINDFULNESS EXERCISES FOR STRESS & ANXIETY

Mindful breathing

This exercise can be done standing up or sitting down, and pretty much anywhere or at any time. It is a good way to refocus or respond to stress in the workplace because all you have to do is be still and focus on your breath for just one minute.

1. Start by breathing in and out slowly.

One cycle should last for approximately 6 seconds. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body.

2. Let go of your thoughts.

Let go of things you have to do later today or later this week. Don't let yourself be preoccupied by the projects or tasks that will require your attention later on. Simply let yourself be still for a minute.

3. Purposefully watch your breath.

Focus your senses - sight, sound, touch - on the pathway of the air as it enters your body through your nose, hold it in your lungs and then let it out through your mouth, paying attention to the way your body moves as you do.

3. Repeat now or later

If you found this relaxing, continue the exercise, or set aside time later on to repeat it. You will find that it is a calming way to focus and slow down your thought processes when you are stressed at work or experiencing conflict.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

Are you stressed out at work, or stuck in a cycle of anxiety or worry? Are you upset or struggling to focus?

Sometimes we can feel like we are caught in a whirlwind of emotions, distractions or demands on our time and our energies.

The exercise below is a quick and easy method for feeling more centred and focused on a tough day.

Try to notice:

5 Things you can see

4 Things you can touch

3 Things you can hear

2 Things you can smell

1 Thing you can taste

Take time on each one and work slowly through the list of things you're taking notice of.

If you begin to notice your mind starting to wander, or other thoughts entering your head as you work through the list, remember that is totally normal!

Our brains are designed to think about many things at once and to be alert to all of the stimuli around us, but we can learn to refocus our attention on just one thing at a time.

Take this as an opportunity to be kind to yourself and not judge or criticise yourself.

Notice that you are having these thoughts and then redirect your attention back to the present moment and keep working through the exercise.

