



# Mindfulness

## Health Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has several benefits to our physical and mental health. Here are some of the ways mindfulness can improve our health:

- **Reduces Stress** – Stress can have serious effects on our physical and mental health. Mindfulness can help minimize or lessen our body's stress responses. This can have health benefits such as lowering blood pressure or strengthening your immune system.
- **Improves Mood** – Mindfulness can improve our overall mood and may reduce mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.
- **Improves Brain Function** – Practicing mindfulness can help build your ability to focus. Over time, meditation can sharpen memory and improve mental performance.
- **Improves Ability to Cope with Pain** – People with chronic pain who practice mindfulness meditation report less severe pain and pain-related distress.

Sometimes it can be difficult to focus on the present moment without worrying about what happened in the past or what may happen in the future. Mindfulness can help us tune into the present moment without judgement or reaction. Practicing mindfulness can also benefit both your health and well-being, and can easily be built into your everyday life.

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## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a state of focus on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Mindfulness includes the following elements:

- **Awareness** – Tuning in to what is happening in the present moment, such as sights, sounds, smells, or physical sensations.
- **Focus** – Paying attention to the present moment, without thinking about the past or the future.
- **Acceptance** – Accepting whatever you may be thinking or feeling, without judgement or trying to change it or your reactions.
- **Observation** – Recognizing unpleasant sensations, thoughts, and feelings as temporary, observe them objectively without reaction or judgement.



**Experiment with different techniques.** It may take time to find the mindfulness practice that is right for you.

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## Other Ways to Practice Mindfulness



- Download a mindfulness app, there are several available for smartphones.
- Read a book about mindfulness.
- Take a meditation or yoga class online or check for in-person classes and resources at your local library, community center, or hospital.
- Journal non-judgementally about your experiences. An Emotion Wheel can be a useful tool to help identify emotions.
- Write 3 things you're grateful for in a journal or gratitude app. Try to list different items everyday.
- Close your eyes and immerse yourself in a happy or calming song. If your mind starts to wander, gently bring your attention back to the music.
- Close your eyes and visualize a calming place or happy memory. Focus on the details, using as many senses as you can.

Get connected to free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor at the Maryland Helpline. Call (2-1-1, press 1), text your zip code to 898-211, or visit [211MD.org](http://211MD.org).



## Mindfulness Techniques

There are a number of techniques you can use to practice mindfulness. Many of these techniques can be practiced anywhere.



**Mindful breathing** – Focus on the movement of your breath, as you breathe in and out, without trying to change it in any way. Do this for a few minutes. If your mind starts to wander, gently bring your attention back to the breath.



**Body Scan** – While seated or lying down, focus your attention on one body part at a time. Notice any physical sensations without judging or reacting to them. You can start with the soles of your feet and gradually move your awareness upwards towards your head.



**Mindful Movement** – While moving, pay attention to your breath, body movements, and surroundings. This exercise can be done during other activities such as stretching or walking.



**Mindful Eating** – Slow down the experience of eating. As you eat, pay attention to the sensations of holding, smelling, tasting, chewing, and swallowing.



**Grounding** – Use your 5 senses to reconnect with your environment. Pause in this moment and identify 5 things you can see; 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.

## Additional Resources

- [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center](#)
- [Greater Good Mindfulness Information](#)
- [Mindfulness Northwest](#)
- [Emotion Wheels](#)

Information adapted from the University of Washington's "How to Reduce Stress Through Mindfulness" factsheet.

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