

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.'

Mindfulness isn't a luxury, it's a practice that trains your brain to be more efficient and better integrated, with less distractibility and improved focus. It minimizes stress and even helps you become your best self. All of us have an emotional 'set point.' Some of us have more of a tendency toward withdrawal, avoidance, negative thinking and other depressive symptoms, whereas others have a greater tendency toward positive moods such as, being curious, tending to approach new things and positive thinking. Through mindfulness, we may be able to train our brains and shift our set points. Mindfulness practice now has an abundance of neuroscience research to support that it helps our brains be more integrated, so your everyday activities, thoughts, attitudes and perceptions are more balanced or well-rounded.

There are many simple ways you can be more mindful. Here are 7 tips to incorporate into your daily life.

- 1. Practice mindfulness during routine activities.** Try bringing awareness to the daily activities you usually do on autopilot. For instance, pay more attention as you're brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating breakfast or walking to work. Focus on the sight, sound, smell, taste and feel of these activities. You might find the routine activity is more interesting than you thought.
- 2. Practice right when you wake up.** Mindfulness practice first thing in the morning helps set the 'tone' of your nervous system for the rest of the day, increasing the likelihood of other mindful moments. Don't read the paper, turn on the TV, check your phone or email, etc. until *after* you've had your 'sit'.
- 3. Let your mind wander.** Your mind and brain are natural wanderers – much like a crawling toddler or a puppy. And that's a good thing. Having a 'busy brain,' is actually an asset. The beneficial brain changes seen in the neuroscience research on mindfulness are thought to be promoted in large part by the act of noticing that your mind has wandered, and then non-judgmentally – lovingly and gently— bringing it back to the present.
- 4. Keep it short.** Our brains respond better to bursts of mindfulness. So being mindful several times a day is more helpful than a lengthy session or even a weekend retreat. While 20 minutes seems to be the gold standard, starting at a few minutes a day is ok too. For instance, you can tune into your body, such as focusing on how your shoes feel on your feet in that moment, or giving attention to how your jaw is doing such as, is it tight, loose or hanging open?

5. Practice mindfulness while you wait. In our fast-paced lives, waiting is a big source of frustration – whether you’re waiting in line or stuck in traffic. But while it might seem like a nuisance, waiting is actually an opportunity for mindfulness. When you’re waiting, bring your attention to your breath. Focus on the flow of the breath in and out of your body, from moment to moment and allow everything else to just be, even if what’s there is impatience or irritation.

6. Pick a prompt to remind you to be mindful. Choose a cue that you encounter on a regular basis to shift your brain into mindful mode. For instance, you might pick a certain doorway or mirror or use drinking coffee or tea as a reminder.

7. Learn to meditate. The best way to cultivate mindfulness in everyday life is to formally train in meditation. Practicing mindfulness is like learning a new language. You can’t just *decide* to be fluent in Spanish – unless you already are – you have to learn the language first. Practicing meditation is how to learn the language of mindfulness. Meditation helps us tap into mindfulness with little effort. Finding a local teacher or using an app is a good idea.