

## Mindfulness

Have you ever noticed that when you are doing quite familiar and repetitive tasks, like driving your car, or vacuuming, that your mind is often miles away thinking about something else? You may be thinking about going on a holiday, worrying about some upcoming event, or thinking about any number of other things.

In either case you are not focusing on your current experience, and you are not really in touch with the 'here and now.' This way of operating is often referred to as *automatic pilot* mode.

*Mindfulness* is the opposite of automatic pilot mode. It is about experiencing the world that is firmly in the 'here and now.' It offers a way of freeing oneself from automatic and unhelpful ways of thinking and responding.

**Mindfulness** is a form of self-awareness training adapted from meditation. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present on a moment-by-moment basis, while not making judgments about whether we like or don't like what we find.

### Core Features of Mindfulness

#### *Observing*

The first major element of mindfulness involves observing your experience in a manner that is more direct and sensual (**sensing mode**), rather than being analytical (**thinking mode**).

#### *Describing*

This aspect of mindfulness relates to noticing the very fine details of what you are observing.

#### *Participating Fully*

An aim of mindfulness is to allow yourself to consider the whole of your experience, without excluding anything.

#### *Being Non-Judgmental*

It is important to adopt an accepting stance towards your experience.

#### *Focusing on One Thing at a Time*

When observing your own experience, a certain level of effort is required to focus your attention on only one thing at a time, from moment to moment.

## **Some Mindfulness Techniques to Practice**

### **One Minute Exercise:**

Sit in front of a clock or watch that you can use to time the passing of one minute. Your task is to focus your entire attention on your breathing, and nothing else, for the minute.

### **Mindful Eating:**

This involves sitting down at a table and eating a meal without engaging in any other activities - no newspaper, book, TV, radio, music, or talking. Eat your meal paying full attention to which piece of food you select to eat, how it looks, how it smells, how you cut the food, the muscles you use to raise it to your mouth, the texture and taste of the food as you chew it slowly.

### **Mindful Walking:**

Here the same principle, while walking you concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, your breathing while walking. Just observe what is around you as you walk, staying in the present.

### **De-stressing Exercise:**

Bring yourself into the present by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. Then ask yourself: "What is going on with me at the moment?" You simply allow yourself to observe whatever happens. Label any thoughts that you have and then leave them alone.... just be prepared to let them float away. Attend to your breathing or simply take in your surroundings instead.

### **Associated Breathing Exercise:**

Stay with any distressing thoughts for a few moments, then as you let them float away, you gently redirect your full attention to your breathing. Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you to move into a state of awareness and stillness.

### **Benefits of Mindfulness:**

By learning to be in mindful mode more often, it is possible to develop a new habit that helps to weaken old, unhelpful and automatic thinking habits. For people with emotional problems, these old habits can involve being overly pre-occupied with thinking about the future, the past, themselves, or their emotions in a negative way. Mindfulness training in this case does not aim to immediately control, remove, or fix this unpleasant experience. Rather, it aims to develop a skill to place you in a better position to break free of or not 'buy into' these unhelpful habits that are causing distress and preventing positive action.