

MINDFULNESS MATTERS FOR SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING



UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS
OF MINDFULNESS AND
INCORPORATE MEDITATION
INTO YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

SUCCESS®



Raise your hand if you often find yourself distracted and struggle to stay present in the moment.

In our always-on world, there's pressure to get more done, faster—all while digital distractions compete relentlessly for our attention. This can lead to moving through days on autopilot, missing out on being present with ourselves and with life itself.

Enter mindfulness.

You can't watch TV, scroll social or flip through the pages of a magazine without spotting references to mindfulness. But it's far from a passing fad: The practice of mindfulness goes back thousands of years. And its benefits are legion.

But how exactly can a person—particularly one who's grown accustomed to responding to ever-present pings from phones and computers—adjust to practicing mindfulness? In this e-book, we'll explore the benefits of mindfulness and how to get started on a practice of mindfulness meditation.

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WHAT IS MINDFULNESS MEDITATION?

Mindfulness, aka mindfulness meditation, is the simple act of focusing your attention on the present.

Mindfulness meditation can take a variety of forms. Anything that clears your mind in a way that allows you to focus on the activity at hand (whether that's simply paying attention to your breathing or to your brush strokes while painting or to the tug on your line while fishing) fits the bill.

Often, mindfulness involves breathing exercises or visualization, according to the Mayo Clinic. Your mindfulness practice may be as simple as taking time to engage with your environment with all your senses, taking a walk or focusing on an object. But your practice can also be more formal, involving a structured meditation exercise, such as taking time to sit, breathe through your nose and focus on your breath as you inhale and exhale, per the Mayo Clinic.

When you're mindful, you experience successive moments in their pure form, taking in sensations and thoughts without judgment or analysis. That is, you stay in the moment. Practicing mindfulness leads to more focus, even when you're not actively doing a meditation exercise, and also helps cut down on stress.



THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

There are many science-based benefits to meditation, including the following:



Anxiety and stress relief

Stress affects everyone and, over time, can lead to a constant sense of anxiety and decrease in overall happiness. A major review of medical and psychological studies published in *Clinical Psychology Review* found that meditation offers short-term benefits, including relief from negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, worry and even fear. Meditation can also help to relieve anxiety and result in stronger long-term mental health.



Improved sleep

Meditation can focus on specific objectives, including sleep, helping you fall asleep faster and sleep more deeply. Turn to guided sleep meditations, sleep stories or ambient nature sounds for a path to better sleep.



Increased brain function

The Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges has reported that mindfulness exercises such as meditation can actually induce changes to the brain's gray matter. The result could be increased motor skills, cognitive function and memory. That is, time spent meditating can make you more productive as well as happier.



An array of physical health benefits

Rather than being separate entities, the mind, body and brain exist on a continuum, and when something benefits our psychological health and well-being, it naturally benefits our bodies as well. In a review of studies, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health found evidence that meditation can benefit in relieving pain, lowering high blood pressure and ending bad health habits such as smoking.

Evidence also suggests that meditation may be correlated with a stronger immune system.



A creativity boost

Mindfulness leads to more creative ideas and a greater ability to build on the ideas of others and think about the big picture, according to the *Harvard Business Review*. Clearing your mind, exhaling anxiety and reaching a state of calm deepens listening and concentration, which in turn heightens your brain's ability to make truly creative connections and envision solutions, especially in potentially stressful situations, says Murray Hidary, a tech entrepreneur, composer, concert pianist and visual artist whose life is grounded in Eastern philosophy and practice.

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH MEDITATION

There are many different ways to approach meditation. For one approach, try following these steps:

1.

Find a quiet space, with no one around and no interruptions.

Carve out some time on the calendar, then turn off your phone and seclude yourself from interruptions. Draw the blinds and reduce light levels. If external noises such as traffic distract you, consider turning on soothing music at low volume.

2.

Make yourself comfortable.

But not so much so that you doze off since your goal is to practice mindfulness while present. A comfortable chair, pillows to prop you up in bed or a meditation pillow on the floor can help. Find your most comfortable fit.

3.

Relax with measured breathing.

Slow, measured breaths help calm your entire body. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, hold that breath for a moment and exhale through pursed lips. If you become at all lightheaded, adjust your breathing pattern until that sensation subsides. Practice taking breaths from your lower chest and belly, also known as diaphragmatic breathing.

4.

Consider using visualization techniques.

After a minute or two, you may find plans, outcomes and other thoughts entering your mind. Visualization can help you remove these distractions. Visualize—that is, imagine—whatever calms you. It may be a tranquil lake, forest retreat or ocean waves washing across the shore in time with your breath. Not only do such images help alleviate anxiety, but they also shift your mind away from worries.

5 Mindfulness Exercises to Try

Choose one—or several—of these exercises to try, and experiment until you find a practice that works for you.

1.

Attend to your breath

Count your inhalation, then exhale for a longer count; for example, inhale for four counts and exhale for six. This stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the body's ability to relax.

4.

Focus on an object

It doesn't matter what the object is, as long as it can hold your focus and ground you. When you first begin your practice, you may find it easier to attend to a flower or a picture of a beloved person rather than, for instance, your computer mouse or anything that reminds you of the stress you're trying to alleviate.

2.

Talk a walk

Not a power walk, but a meander—preferably in nature. Notice the beauty around you.

5.

Try a combination of methods

Take a walk while listening to music. Breathe deeply as you focus on a piece of art. Work with music in the background.

3.

Listen to meditative music

Although your favorite songs may cheer you up or make you want to dance, meditative music can have its own impact.



TIPS FOR INCORPORATING MINDFULNESS INTO YOUR DAY

Although these exercises may not be inherently difficult, the hardest part of practicing mindfulness will be actually taking the time to practice—and valuing its importance. Here are a few tricks to make this adjustment easier:



Take charge of your calendar

Block off a stretch of time each day to practice mindfulness and to leave space for creative thinking.

Prioritize quality over quantity

If you're struggling to maintain your practice or can't imagine taking the time to do "nothing," remember that a little can go a long way—and feel free to pace yourself. A five-minute mindful walk trumps a 25-minute hunched-shoulder walk.

Shake yourself out of binary all-or-nothing thinking

Mindfulness practice does not have to take an hour of your day. Small, repeated actions throughout the day will serve.

Practice wherever, whenever

A sacred space is not necessary. Stuck at a light in your car? Take a few breaths. Waiting for an appointment? Go for a short walk.

Apply it to professional challenges

If you have an important meeting or negotiating session, use a mindfulness strategy to prepare for more active listening. Try asking the other meeting attendees to join you, especially if the stakes are high or the problem is thorny.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO MEDITATE?

When you're aiming to meditate for a minute or two, it's easy to slot into your schedule. Longer practices require more planning.



The best time to meditate is when you can enjoy relative quiet. Beginners will especially benefit from an area free of distractions. Consider times of day you have a room, if not the entire home, to yourself because distractions such as noise from TV or children playing can make learning meditation difficult. Similarly, don't try to "squeeze in" a 20-minute meditation immediately prior to other obligations. Being concerned about missing an appointment can be more distracting than noise.

Here are a few popular times of day to begin building your mindful self-care routine:

Morning:

A morning meditation of five or 10 minutes is a great start in developing healthy morning habits. Morning meditations serve to focus the mind and relieve any anxiety we may feel in facing the day. Rather than feeling rushed, you can begin your day with calm and confidence.

During your commute:

You can't meditate while driving, but it is a great time to practice related mindfulness. Don't let that morning meditation go to waste by

becoming stressed over a crowded bus or heavy traffic. This is where meditation and mindfulness apps come in handy.

During your workday:

A light five- or 10-minute meditation will allow you to relieve the anxiety of a hectic morning and focus better in the afternoon. If you work from home or have your own office, it's easy to find solitude. But if you don't have such privacy, there are other mindful habits you can build. For instance, a lunchtime walk provides both exercise and calm.

In the afternoon or evening:

For most people, nighttime serves as the best time for longer meditations of 20 minutes or more. You can free up time by simply turning off the television and getting away from social media for the night. As part of your evening routine, these deeper meditations serve multiple purposes. They provide all the mental and physiological benefits of meditation, such as increased focus and mindfulness, reduced tension and heart rate, and an overall sense of calm, happiness and well-being. But as part of an overall wind down before bed, they also help prepare your body and mind for a best night's sleep.

5 Recommended Meditation Apps

Training and guidance can help you get comfortable meditating on your own. Here are some of the meditation apps we recommend.



Headspace

Hundreds of professionally guided meditations teach you to relieve stress and live a fuller existence. A sleep feature offers additional sleep meditations, calming music and soundscapes to rest more deeply.

[App Store & Google Play](#)



Calm

With millions of users, Calm holds the crown as the most popular app for meditation, sleep and relaxation. It offers both guided and unguided meditation exercises of varying lengths to suit your schedule.

[App Store & Google Play](#)

Insight Timer

Insight Timer ranks as the No. 1 free meditation app. It offers a vast library of more than 100,000 meditation and music tracks. Plus, some of the world's top mindfulness experts upload more than 80 guided meditations daily.

[App Store & Google Play](#)

Balance: Meditation and Sleep



Each day, after you answer a few questions, Balance chooses a daily meditation from hundreds of audio files suited to your current needs. The app also includes 10-day plans to help you develop your meditation skills.

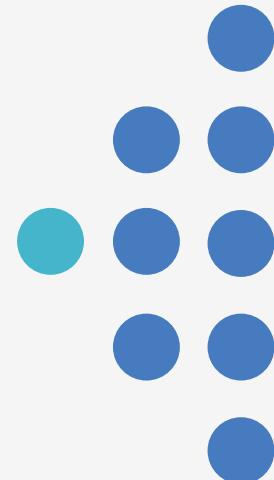
[App Store & Google Play](#)

Ten Percent Happier



This beginner-friendly app makes learning to meditate easy and fun. It offers new content weekly and comes with a library of more than 500 guided meditations arranged by topics such as stress relief and focus.

[App Store & Google Play](#)



Note: While these apps are free to download, most require a subscription.

MEDITATION OBSTACLES—AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Quieting your mind is a directive that's both vague and challenging. Here are some of the most common meditation roadblocks and how to get past them.



MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "I CAN'T GET MY MIND TO GO BLANK."

Emptying your mind completely is not necessarily the goal, but rather, you're quieting the mind chatter—about what's for dinner or when a report is due or that you have to sign your kids up for baseball.

Here's how: Start by sitting comfortably and closing your eyes (or leave them half-open if that feels more natural), says Sharon Salzberg, co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, and author of *Real Happiness at Work*. Set a timer for five to 10 minutes so you don't have to worry about the time. Then focus your attention on your breathing and mentally note "in" and "out" with each breath. Think about how the air feels coming into and leaving your body.

If your mind wanders, don't worry about it; your meandering thoughts "provide an opportunity to gently let go of whatever has distracted you," Salzberg says. "With kindness toward yourself, begin again by bringing your attention back to the breath. If you have to let go and begin again countless times, that's not considered a problem—that's the training."

Salzberg advises practicing three days a week and slowly building up to 20 minutes every day.

MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "I DON'T HAVE TIME."

If five minutes a day is too much of a commitment, that's OK. You can still engage in mindfulness. That's because you don't have to think about breathing patterns for it to qualify.

Rather, the practice of mindfulness involves bringing mindfulness into everything you do, not just when you're sitting and focusing on your breath. The goal is to be truly present in whatever it is you are doing.

Thích Nhát Hanh, a well-known Vietnamese Zen master and human rights activist, uses the example of washing dishes in his book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. He does not wash dishes to get it over with. As he performs the chore, he is "fully aware of the dish, the water and each movement of my hands." He instructs us to not let worries about work or kids distract us from being fully present and appreciative while, yes, scrubbing pots.

Find activities throughout the day—whether it's folding laundry, dancing, gardening or washing your face and brushing your teeth—that can be meditative for you.

MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "I CAN'T GET IN THE LOTUS POSITION."

You don't have to! The lotus position—sitting cross-legged with each foot on top of the opposite thigh—is an ancient asana (posture) used during traditional Buddhist meditation because it allows practitioners to stay steady and motionless for long periods of time. But it's not necessary for successful meditation. You can meditate anytime, anywhere, just by sitting or lying comfortably, Salzberg says.

MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "I CAN'T SIT STILL."

Then don't! Exercises that involve repetitive, rhythmic motions—such as swimming, walking and running—are particularly good for getting that in-the-moment meditative feel. Zen Buddhists practice a form of walking meditation called kinhin, which involves coordinating your steps with your breathing. The idea is to focus on one thing at a time; if you walk, you focus on your steps. The concentration naturally allows for calmer, clearer thoughts.

MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "TV AND VIDEO GAMES FEEL MORE RELAXING TO ME."

Watching TV or playing video games can feel relaxing in the short run, and no one's saying you should give them up. Sometimes those aren't options, though. If you're at a contentious meeting at work, for example, you can't watch an hour of television to chill out before responding to colleagues. "But you can rest your attention on the feeling of your breath to help you get back into the moment and back to yourself" Salzberg says. "Meditation is a tool you can take anywhere." No one even has to know you're doing it!

MEDITATION OBSTACLE: "I'VE TRIED IT AND DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING."

Meditation takes practice. We're so used to multitasking and thinking about a million things at once that trying to clear your mind can feel awkward and frustrating—the opposite of calm. But meditation is a skill to be worked at.

If you need more help focusing your attention, try using a mantra: Say a word or simple phrase; it can be anything that is easy to repeat and does not conjure negative feelings like "peace" or "love" or "I can." For some people, the spoken, repeated mantra may be more of a tangible focal point than just their breathing, and the sound vibrations can be calming. You can also try prayer beads or any old string of beads. Pass a bead through your fingers with each breath you take.





STICK WITH IT

When it comes to embracing mindfulness and developing a meditation practice, you're far from alone.

Sting does it through yoga. Eddie Van Halen plays guitar to do it. Lou Reed counted beads. The poet Ted Hughes fished. Gisele Bündchen does it on the beach, and Oprah Winfrey does it every morning.

While the potential benefits of meditation, including easing insomnia, supporting immunity and reducing stress, are clear, that's not to say it's an easy practice to pick up and maintain. We hope this e-book has provided you with the tools to get started.



One final piece of advice: Even when it's challenging, stick with it! Meditation is a lifelong tool with lifelong benefits.