

5 components of mindful exercise

Whatever the exercise, however hard we're working, if we're not doing it mindfully, we're not really doing it justice. So, to get the maximum benefit from all that effort, we just need to think about, and apply, the five components of mindful exercise. Try bringing your awareness to them the next time you workout, and notice the change in how you feel.

1. Intention

Even before we lift a weight or take a step, our workout routine has begun. That's because our mental intention, and the awareness we bring to it, really impacts on how effective our exercise will be. Intention is all about mental preparation. It's our motivation to do the exercise, understanding of its function, preparation of the body to engage, confidence in the required breathing, timing and form, and finally, our commitment to go for it! Sounds like a lot to think about? With practice, we can bring awareness to it all in just a few seconds and get every workout off to a really strong start.

2. Breathing

Seen those red faced people in the gym holding their breath as they grunt through their workouts? They might look like they're training hard, but in actuality, exercising this way is very inefficient and ineffective. Our muscles need oxygen to move. Deprive them, and we feel tired, tense and nauseated. So focus on breathing steadily, in for the less strenuous part, out during the most effort, for a high performance workout that leaves us energized and ready for more.

3. Timing

Rhythm is vital. Whether it's a nice long stretch or an explosive jump, every exercise has its own inherent tempo to recognize. By using this rhythm to give exercise a natural, flowing, easy style, we can forget robotic, stiff or tense movements, and instead apply the right timing to perform the exercise most effectively.

4. Form

Good form takes exercise across the entire range of movement, targeting every part of the muscle. It can make any exercise a thing of beauty, but is often hard to achieve and maintain, especially when we're sweating our way through an intense workout. But with focus, it's possible. Posture and alignment really matter, so we must be aware of them. Think less about reaching the end of the workout, and more about every single muscle movement. This way, the best results from exercise come naturally.

5. Recovery

Whether it's recovery between workouts or between exercises, an awareness of our physical, emotional and mental well-being during this 'downtime' is essential. So don't switch off. Instead, stay alert and focus on the breath and other physical sensations. Is your breath indicating you could work harder, or that you should ease off? Check you're not hunching your shoulders, this limits your capacity to take oxygen on-board. Recovery periods are essential for a healthy, well-rested and injury free body. Listen to it, treat it well and give it the rest it needs, and the body will always be ready for more!

Mindfulness + workout = results

Mindful exercise gives us the maximum benefit from our workouts in the minimum amount of time. Bringing a greater awareness to exercise also makes it safer, and more fun. Of course, as with any new skill, perfecting all five elements takes practice. But allow yourself the time to master them, because the results you'll see will really surprise you.