

5 ways to get mindfulness into your everyday life

Mindfulness starts to get really interesting when we can learn to integrate it into everyday life. Remember, mindfulness means to be present, in the moment. And if you can do it sitting on a chair, then why not do it while out shopping, drinking a cup of tea, eating your food, holding your baby, working at the computer or having a chat with a friend? All of these are opportunities to apply mindfulness, to be aware.

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Here are five situations to which you could easily apply mindfulness on a daily basis. Typically, these are the kind of events where your mind is wandering – but it doesn't have to be this way. This isn't about trying to stop thoughts and feelings, but learning to step back from them, allowing them to come and go. And if you do find yourself suddenly lost in thought, no problem at all – simply bring your attention back to the physical senses and whatever it is you're doing.

1. Mindfulness while brushing your teeth

The old way: Vague awareness of picking up your toothbrush and moving it around the mouth on autopilot as you wander around the house, tripping over the cat, looking for your keys, mentally preparing for your first meeting of the day.

The new way: Being mindful of your feet on the floor, the temperature and texture on the soles of your feet; mindful of the appearance, smell, flavor and texture of the toothpaste; mindful of the arm moving from side to side and the sound of the brush against your teeth; mindful of each and every tooth and the sensation of the brush against your gums.

Bonus: Not only will you feel calm and collected, your dentist will be happy, too!

2. Mindfulness while taking a shower

The old way: Acute awareness of scolding hot water alternating with freezing cold water until you find the sweet spot. From there, the mind wanders off as you sing your favorite tune into the shower head.

The new way: Being mindful of the need to set the temperature before getting into the shower; mindful of the wave of pleasure as the warm water washes over you; mindful of the smell of the shower gel, soap or shampoo; mindful of the mind jumping forward, imagining conversations that have yet to happen; mindful of the amount of water you're using; and mindful of the sound of the water coming to a stop.

Bonus: Greenpeace will love you for it, and you'll end up with a much clearer mind for the day ahead.

3. Mindfulness while commuting to work

The old way: Standing like a sardine squashed into a tin can on a train or bus, resenting anyone who has a seat, feeling nauseous at the potent cocktail of perfumes, aftershaves, deodorants and hairsprays, while trying to keep your cool as a stroller rocks back and forth into your shins. Alternatively, sitting in the relative comfort of a car, but in traffic so slow that you fear you might actually have to put the car into reverse.

The new way: Being mindful of your environment and the tendency to resist it; being mindful of the emotions as they rise and fall, come and go; mindful of all the different senses, but rather than thinking about them, judging them or analyzing them, simply acknowledging them; mindful of wanting to be somewhere else, of wishing time away; and mindful of wanting to scream out loud or put your foot down in the car.

Bonus: The other people around you will almost certainly appreciate your lack of road-rage, train-rage or bus-rage and, you never know, you may even find yourself turning up to work with a smile on your face.

4. Mindfulness while washing the dishes

The old way: Vaguely aware of the need to avoid the sharp knife hidden beneath the plates in the water, as you stare out of the window and wonder why Mrs. green coat with the brown shoes from number 48 doesn't get together with Mr. square jaw with the fancy car from number 32. They're both single, and they look as though they'd be perfect together.

The new way: Being mindful of the very first moment when your hands meet the water; mindful of the warmth and the transference of heat to the body; mindful of picking up one thing at a time and taking just an extra second or two to clean it thoroughly; mindful of the passing thoughts and of letting them go; mindful of seeing people come and go through the window without getting involved in any storylines; mindful of wanting to get on and do something else; and mindful of feeling satisfied when you've finished.

Bonus: OK, so you have a dishwasher, but you get the picture. And if the dishwasher ever breaks, you'll know that it is possible to get some Headspace while washing the dishes.

5. Mindfulness while waiting in line

The old way: As you stand there tapping your foot, arms crossed and jaws clenched, you wonder why everyone else has chosen the exact same time as you to come to the bank. As you flick through old texts and emails on your cell, desperately searching for something, anything, to do to escape your own impatience, you consider the possibility of robbing the place one day (hypothetically of course), absentmindedly looking to see where the different cameras are and, thereby, getting your picture saved to yet another database in the sky.

The new way: Being mindful of the sense of urgency with which you enter the bank; mindful of your reaction when you first see the line; mindful of your posture as you stand there waiting; mindful of your breath as you focus on the physical sensations in the body; mindful of your reaction each time the line creeps forward; mindful of the tendency to keep looking at your watch, checking your phone or looking for some kind of distraction; and mindful of your interaction with another human being when you finally get served.

Bonus: You can see the line as an irritating inconvenience or as an opportunity to take a break. Either way, you know you're not really going to rob the bank, so why are you even looking?