



Mindfulness: Mindful Observing

Creative Wellbeing Workshops

The quality or state of being conscious or aware

What is “Mindfulness”? Many of us have heard the term but aren’t exactly sure what it means to be “mindful”. At its simplest, mindfulness is focusing our attention and awareness on the present moment. Although there is often the suggestion to suspend judgment or accept what we notice, true mindfulness is simply observing what is happening in and around us even if part of what we notice is judgments and resistance.

Where does mindfulness originate? Mindfulness is rooted in Eastern Buddhist and Hindu traditions which suggest that enlightenment is cultivated through focused attention, awareness and being present. Jon Kabat-Zinn is credited with popularizing it in the West through his work with clients with chronic pain. He observed that although we are inclined to avoid pain, avoidance leads to greater distress whereas observing the pain can lead to some distancing and relief from it.

Why be mindful? Beyond helping to control pain, mindfulness also helps people manage anxiety, stress, cravings, and emotional distress. Developing and increasing awareness of ourselves and our environment increases our ability to manage how we respond to what is happening to us.

How to Be Mindful?

Throughout your day, stop at regular intervals to notice what you are experiencing, your environment, and your behaviors. Try to simply observe, to be curious, without evaluating what you experience (and if you find that you are judging what you are experiencing, feeling or doing, try to notice *that* without judgment).

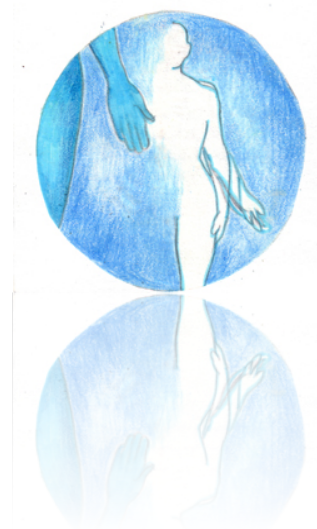
We suggest beginning with a mindful practice 3-4 times/day. You can pick specific times or do it randomly.

Your Body

- Notice your posture, how you are standing/sitting
- Notice any areas of tension, discomfort or pain
- Notice any areas of where you are comfortable/tension free
- Notice your energy level
- Notice how focused your eyes are
- Notice sensation in the mouth/jaw
- If you are eating, notice what the food feels and taste like
- Notice your breathing

Your Feelings

- Notice if you are having any feelings



- If so, try to identify and name what you are feeling without changing that feeling(s)
- If you are having feeling(s), notice if you are experiencing them in a particular part of your body

Your Thoughts



- Notice what your mind is doing
- What is the quality of your thoughts?
 - Clear/focused/jumbled/racing
 - No thoughts/Mind is blank or still
- Confusion/Difficulty focusing
- Notice the content of your thoughts: memories, daydreaming, planning, trying to solve a problem, ruminating or obsessing about a problem, etc.

Your Environment

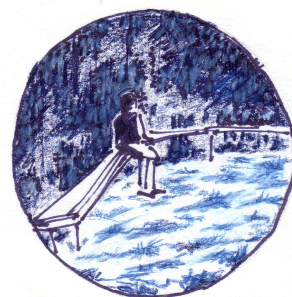
- Notice where you are
- Notice elements of your environment (plants, furniture, people, creatures, etc.)
- Notice the weather
- Notice the kind of light coming into your immediate environment
- Notice who is around you
- Notice the sounds in your environment (nature, machines, people talking, music)
- Notice any smells
- Notice others and what they are doing/saying

Your Behaviors

- What are you doing?
- What is the pace of what you're doing/fast or slow, erratic, methodical?
- What is the impact of what you're doing on you? On your environment?
- How are people responding to you and your behaviors?

As you become more aware and mindful, broaden your observations to:

- When you are leaving a place/When you arrive at another place
- When you are in transition
- When you are in meetings
- When you are very busy and in a rush
- When you realize you are feeling strong physical sensations or strong feelings
- When you are doing something impulsively
- When you are interacting with another person
- When you are interacting with someone you find unpleasant/pleasant
- When you are doing parts of your work or things in your life you find unpleasant/pleasant



Remember to try observing yourself--your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors--with as little judgment and as much curiosity as possible!

Kabat-Zinn J (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Bantam Dell. [ISBN 978-0345539724](https://www.bantam.com/9780345539724).

Nyanaponika. T. (1973) *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: Satipatthāna : a Handbook of Mental Training Based on the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness, with an Anthology of Relevant Texts Translated from the Pali and Sanskrit.*