

Introduction to Mindfulness

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Mindfulness always consists of two components:

Awareness & Acceptance

Awareness takes place when we intentionally focus on our present experience. Usually in a mindfulness exercise we are asked to bring our awareness to one part of our experience, perhaps our thoughts, or maybe a physical sensation. In advanced mindfulness we can play with attempting to be aware of the entirety of what we are experiencing, externally and internally in any given moment.

Acceptance is the practice of non-judgment towards our experiences. This does NOT mean that we have to like the experiences, only that we are accepting that they are there. It becomes quickly apparent how easy it is to judge something as a good or bad before we can fully experience it for simply what it is. The trick here is to witness our experiences (thoughts, feelings, or sensations) as if we are an impartial observer to them.

Simple but Not Easy

Mindfulness is relatively simple, but not always easy. You may find that once you understand the principles of acceptance and awareness, you wonder what all the fuss is about. Just remember, it's called a mindfulness **practice** for a reason. Mindfulness isn't something that you understand or accomplish and then move on from, but something that you learn to engage throughout each and every day, moment to moment.

Our mind wanders and we can easily lose touch with our mindful awareness. The point of the practice is to keep remembering to be mindful throughout the day. How that will look like is entirely up to you. Some people like to do a sitting mindfulness practice once or twice a day, but this isn't necessary. Make it your own practice, play around with it, have fun with it!

Simple Mindfulness Exercise

Below is an example of how you might apply mindfulness. You can treat this like a guided meditation or just read through it to get an idea of how to apply the principles in action. In either case I encourage you to really try to **experience** mindfulness and don't just try to understand it intellectually.

Take a deep breath in and let it out. Make it slow.

Pay attention to the physical sensations of the breath. We breathe constantly, but how often do we notice how it feels? Allow your breath to resume a natural but relaxed pace. Notice how your lungs fill up with life giving air. Notice the feeling of air passing through your nose, as well as perhaps the subtle sensation on the back of your throat as it passes through to your chest. Feel how your chest rises, and belly expands with each inhale.

Now, start to be aware if you are judging yourself or experience, for good or bad. Notice if there are thoughts expressing criticisms about the practice or wondering if you're doing it right. See if you can observe those thoughts without believing them. There is no right or wrong here, only practice. As you catch your mind wondering, gently bring your awareness back to your breath.

At first, start with this practice for about 30 seconds to a couple of minutes at most. A little goes a long way and there is nothing gained by forcing a long practice if you don't ever want to do it again.

After you have become comfortable with this exercise, experiment with applying mindfulness to other physical sensations besides just the breath, or perhaps to an emotional experience or familiar thought pattern. The true therapeutic value of mindfulness comes when these principles can be applied to our most uncomfortable feelings thoughts and sensations. If trying this becomes too overwhelming it may be best to seek guidance from a professional.