



MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

*Twenty empowering exercises
Your concise guide to living a Mindful Life*

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AN INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness exercises and meditations stem from the discipline of Positive Psychology – a branch of academic and applied Psychology that focuses on *how things go right* in humans.

Initially driven by the eminent social psychologist Martin Seligman, positive psychology and *Mindfulness* have now fully taken hold and are incorporated into many areas of day-to-day life.

Healthcare, teaching and personal development are three key areas that have benefited from Mindfulness-based interventions.

WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS MEAN?

The vast majority of us live our day-to-day life on auto-pilot. Many experiences, feelings and practices become so routine to us that we barely notice them.

To be mindful is to purposefully turn off your auto-pilot and actively experience your life.

The exercises in this booklet will help you rediscover the excitement and appreciation of life that you experienced as a child; when nothing had yet become routine – a stage in our life that is pregnant with an unlimited potential for growth, learning and achievement.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS?

The benefits are multiple and whole books have been written exploring the strengths that individuals are able to build on with the help of Mindfulness exercises. To select just a few benefits of practicing Mindfulness techniques:

- Mindfulness can enhance your creativity.
- Mindfulness enhances your resilience to stress and reduces anxiety.
- Mindfulness benefits interpersonal interactions and relationships.

FOR HOW LONG SHOULD I PRACTICE MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES?

Eight weeks of Mindfulness meditation leads to significant changes in the brain. Individuals who take the time to be mindful of themselves and their environments demonstrate greater activity in the lower pre-frontal cortex – the centre for positive emotions in the brain.

After eight weeks you will notice that you are already incorporating Mindfulness into your everyday activities and soon enough you'll find that you are no longer taking time out to complete Mindfulness Exercises; instead you are living a Mindful Life.

1. BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises are simple, yet effective tools that enable you to become more aware of the present; the *here-and-now*.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: A MINDFUL MINUTE

Find a quiet, comfortable space and set a timer to 60 seconds. During these 60 seconds, devote all of your attention to your breathing. If you notice your mind wandering, acknowledge the distraction and redirect your attention to your breathing.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: BREAK YOUR BREATHING ROUTINE

Making the familiar unfamiliar is a technique that helps you become mindful of your automatic processes.

Find a quiet comfortable space and set a timer to 60 seconds.

During the first 60 seconds, breathe using only your mouth. Repeat this exercise, breathing only through your right nostril. And finally, repeat the exercise breathing just through your left nostril.

For the duration of this exercise, devote all your attention to your breathing. If you notice your mind wandering, acknowledge the distraction and redirect your attention to your breathing.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: BREATHING THOUGHTS

Find a quiet, comfortable space away from distractions. You may do this mindfulness meditation exercise with your eyes open or closed.

Begin by focusing on your breathing. As you breathe you will notice your mind begin to wander. Allow your mind to wander, but be mindful of the thoughts. Experience, notice and acknowledge the thoughts and then redirect your attention back to your breathing.

Continue this exercise for the duration of time you have set aside. Each time, allowing your attention to follow your thoughts. Noticing this shift in attention, acknowledging the thought and then returning focus to your breathing.

2. BODY SCAN

In addition to *Mindful Breathing*, thriving individuals are acutely aware of what it feels like to *be* them; of how it is to live within their own skin.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: THE BODY SCAN

At first, set aside 5 minutes to complete this exercise. With experience, body scans will become more in depth and you may find you wish to take more time to enjoy the experience.

In a quiet, comfortable space notice and appreciate how your body feels. Be mindful of each detail as you make a considered journey from your toes all the way to the top of your head.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: OWN YOUR BODY'S EXPERIENCES

People often treat accidents, pains and injuries as negative experiences. This can lead to a reduction in psychological well-being. Thriving individuals, notice and experience their physical symptoms in a non-judgmental way.

Next time you notice a physical pain (or pleasure), be mindful of its intensity, location, duration, and so forth. If this experience is localised to your left arm, consider how this differs to your feelings in your right arm.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: MINDFUL POSES

Amy Cuddy conducted research on a simple 2-minute intervention which boosts an individual's confidence. The intervention, which she termed the 'Power Pose' sees the practitioner adopt a large, open position for 2 minutes at the beginning of the day, or immediately prior to completing a task that may cause anxiety.

Simply spreading the arms wide and opening the palms out signals to your brain that you are confident, open-minded, and in control. This, in turn, helps you to relax and flourish in your situation.

Research from Harvard University on 'Superhero Poses' provides similar results to those of Cuddy, but with a focus on altruism and doing good unto others.

Individuals who deliberately hold a superhero pose, such as that of Superman flying, and consciously picture themselves in that role, perform in a more altruistic and charitable way later on that day.

3. ENHANCE YOUR SENSES

Every second your sensory receptors are subject to an infinite number of stimuli – far more than you are able to consciously perceive. Use these exercises to expand and enhance how much of the physical and social world you are able to experience.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: A MINDFUL OBJECT

Mindfulness training exercises encourage you to experience beyond what others take for granted.

Take an object with which you are familiar. Place it in front of you and give yourself 5 minutes to truly examine it.

Watch it, touch it, smell it. Explore the object in a way that you have not previously.

Even though the object itself may be entirely trivial, you are training your brain to take a more active interest in the world around you.

Thriving individuals are better enabled to make the most of situations, are unconsciously prepared to make the best of opportunities as they present themselves.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: A MINDFUL MOUTHFUL

Take one simple piece of food (e.g. a raisin or a square of chocolate). Break down the process of eating this item so that every element of the process is done consciously and mindfully.

SIGHT: First, look at the item on a plate. Without touching it, take in the shape, colour, how it reflects the light, and so on.

SMELL: Bring the plate close to your nose so that you are able to smell the item. Take a moment to fully notice the smell.

TOUCH: Allow yourself to pick the item up from the plate and feel it in your hands.

SOUND: Depending on the item you have chosen, it may make a sound when handled – and will almost definitely make a sound when eaten – so be mindful of the auditory experience associated with this food item.

TASTE: Only once you have fully explored the previous four senses may you put the item in your mouth. Before biting the item, allow it to rest on your tongue. Be mindful of how your body reacts. Notice the taste growing. Examine the texture of the item on your tongue. At the point when you can wait no longer, allow yourself to bite into the item, chew and swallow.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: A MINDFUL FRUITBOWL

Artists devote hours to the study of fruit in still life compositions, yet most people barely notice an item of fruit as they prepare to eat it.

This exercise challenges you to be fully mindful of the intricate details that make each item unique.

Select a fruit at random from a bowl of similar fruits – this exercise could be also be done with other object types, such as marbles or flowers – and examine it for a period of time. Allow yourself to notice as much of the fruit's form, smell, texture and so forth.

Continue your examination of the item until you are confident that you could select that item with complete confidence after returning it to the fruit bowl.

To test your mindful examination of the item, try to reselect the same item once it has been placed alongside the other fruits.

THE FOURTH EXERCISE: YOUR SIXTH SENSE

People often refer to an elusive sixth sense; that of feelings and emotions.

Humans are social animals and the way we interact and engage with each other relies – in no small part – on our ability to manipulate and interpret this sixth sense.

Language evokes strong emotional responses from us, so in this exercise allow your mind to fill up with emotional responses to a series of words. This exercise will bring to a conscious level what automatically happens during every conversation we have.

For each word, be mindful of the way the word sounds and feels as you say it aloud. How does the word affect your breathing? Be aware of your general emotional response and then observe as you delve more deeply into your personal meaning and connotations of the word. In a non-judgmental manner, label your emotional responses to the words: notice, acknowledge (label), and continue.

Here is a list of words to help get you started:

Yellow

Travel

Massage

Balloon

Red

Holiday
Freedom
Discovery
Blue
Regret
Exponential
Giggle
Green
Inspiring
France
Secret
Grandma
Expert
Home
Praise
Luck
Chocolate
Dream
Sting
Hurt
Doodle
Passion

This exercise can also be completed by viewing works of art or reading poems or passages of prose.

4. WRITTEN EXERCISES

Mindfulness exercises reach beyond meditations and many popular exercises involve written or drawing elements.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: A GRATITUDE LETTER

We all know someone who has done something wonderful for us, yet we feel that we have not thanked them appropriately.

This exercise provides you with the opportunity to commit to paper your appreciation of that person.

In your letter be sure to include what you are thanking them for and - most importantly - how it made you feel.

You may choose to send the person your gratitude letter. However, the exercise is just as powerful even if the person to whom you are grateful never receives the letter.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: THE GIFT OF COMPASSION

This exercise requires you to step outside of yourself for a period of time and write yourself a letter from someone else's point of view.

Pick someone – real or of your creation – who thinks highly of you and truly wants you to succeed and prosper.

Write yourself a letter, from this person, expressing a heartfelt desire that you (the recipient of this letter) experience peace and tranquility, happiness and joy. You may wish to adapt the content of the letter to fit your goals and aspirations.

This exercise works on two levels: first, mindfully experience the process of writing the letter and of drawing these positive wishes from within you. The second stage of the exercise is to read the letter, and experience what it is like to have someone wish these positive things for you.

A key point to clarify with regards to the second stage of this exercise is that this is *not* a fictional letter – you are reading your own desires and dreams for yourself. Being mindful of your inner wishes enables you to seek and to achieve them.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF (BPS)

Consider a scenario – this could be inspired by a news story, or a fictional event from a film or book. It could even be a real event that you have experienced in your own life.

Write a fictional diary entry for that scenario in which you act as your best possible self. Describe in detail how you felt, what you saw and how you acted. Provide reasons and explanations. Add details about who else was involved, what they did or said, and so on.

Thriving individuals play-out their Best Possible Self because they have trained themselves to be mindful of what this is and what it feels like to achieve it.

THE FOURTH EXERCISE: THE THREE BLESSINGS

The Three Blessings is a small, yet powerful exercise that helps you become mindful – on a daily basis – of the positives in your life.

Before you go to bed, write three things that went well that day, and why.

Some days you may find it a challenge to limit yourself to the key three blessings; on other days it will take longer to recall just three blessings.

5. EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS

Thriving individuals enhance their day-to-day experiences by applying mindfulness techniques beyond meditation sessions. These exercises can be unobtrusively incorporated into your everyday life.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: TOUCH POINTS

Mindfulness is all about living in the present and fully experiencing your life. *Touch Points* provides you with an external stimulus to remind you of this aim and provide you with an opportunity – randomly throughout your day – to pause and be fully mindful of your present moment.

Select an object, a word or an action and commit to yourself that every time you come across this object, word or action in your day you will take a moment to fully notice and experience your life as it is at that moment in time.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: DOT B

Living mindfully needn't be a solitary activity. This *everyday mindfulness* exercise includes your friends or family in your aim to fully experience life in the moment.

Explain to your friends, family or colleagues your aim and how mindfulness enhances an individual's well-being and ability to thrive.

After explaining to them the benefits of being mindful, agree with each other that you will randomly gift each other a moment of mindfulness by sending the other a text or email message containing the two characters: . B

Dot B stands for stop (*dot*) and just be (*B*). When you receive this message, take a moment to stop and experience where you are, what you're doing, how you're feeling – and then continue.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: FULLY EXPERIENCE A REGULAR ROUTINE

We all run on auto-pilot every now and again. Our jobs, and even personal lives, are peppered with routines and tasks that we have completed so many times that we are no longer fully aware of our actions.

Musicians may be particularly aware of the disarming sensation when you attempt to consciously play a melody that you would usually rattle off without a conscious thought, and it seems more challenging.

Take a routine that you do regularly and complete it consciously focusing on what you are doing.

Even small chores like photocopying a document, or washing the dishes can provide you with an opportunity to exercise your *Mindful Muscle* and live in the here-and-now.

THE FOURTH EXERCISE: DRAW THE DIFFERENCE

Often we are aware of a change we want to make for ourselves but feel unaware as to how we can bring about that change.

Becoming mindful of the differences between the now and desired future point can illuminate agents of change to set the ball rolling.

If you enjoy drawing, divide your page in two and, on the left hand side, draw your current situation. It doesn't have to be a complex, or even skilled, drawing – the act of mindfully drawing it out is enough.

On the right hand side of the page, draw your desired end-point. On this side try to include as many details as you can. Allow yourself to spend some time on this half of the paper – spend time experiencing this desired state in your head and then committing it to paper to the best of your ability.

Using the medium of drawing as a tool for your mindful exploration of your goal will help you discover some potential next steps towards achieving your goal.

Pinning your drawing up in a place you will often see it will help as another reminder to be mindful of your goal and your journey towards achieving it.

THE FIFTH EXERCISE: MINDFUL COLOURING

Mindful colouring has become something of a craze recently and the number of colouring-in books published for adults has increased dramatically.

These exercises can be a fulfilling creative output, but it is important to remember that in order for these to be fully meaningful as part of a mindful approach, you will want to take time to dedicate your attention to the act of colouring-in the drawing, rather than allowing the act of colouring-in to be a form of escapism.

Whilst colouring, be mindful of your choice of colours and how that makes you feel; the feel of the pencil within your grip; the position you are holding your body in; be aware of the over-arching act of creativity; and, as always, spare a thought for your breathing.

6. A 15-MINUTE DE-STRESS

Sometimes stressful situations can get the better of us, and mindfulness meditation is a successful approach to help you remain calm and regain control of the situation.

STEP ONE: NOTICE THE STRESS

As with all Mindfulness techniques, the first step is to become aware of the fact that you are stressed. As soon as you have consciously noticed and acknowledged this you are ready to deal with the stress.

STEP TWO: FOCUS ON BREATHING AND POSTURE

Hold yourself with confidence and dignity as you slow your breathing. A few deep, controlled breaths will help you approach the stressful situation with your best foot forward.

STEP THREE: OBJECTIFY THE SITUATION

Objectively ask yourself, 'What is happening with me at this moment?' As you answer this question, acknowledge your thoughts as they come into consciousness and then let them float away. Give your feelings with short, non-judgmental labels, such as: 'that is a negative thought', or 'that is an angry feeling'.

Don't pass judgment. Just notice, acknowledge and move on.

STEP FOUR: REFOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON YOUR BREATHING

Any time you find your attention following one of your thoughts, refocus your attention on your breath rather than allowing a negative, or stressful, scenario to play out in your mind's eye.

STEP FIVE: OBSERVE THE STRESS AS A THIRD PARTY

Just 10 to 15 minutes of observing, labeling and moving on will help you re-evaluate the situation.

This technique simulates an out-of-body evaluation of your present situation and helps you observe your scenario and instinctive stress response as if you were a neutral onlooker.

With the initial stressor now reduced you are better equipped to tackle the issue in a calm, controlled manner, that will not only mean you are better equipped to provide a solution to the present situation, but you'll be armed with the experience and confidence to do it again in the future.

If this e-Book has helped you, please share it with your family and friends.

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