

Mindfulness

Mindfulness focuses your mind on the present moment. It trains your mind to be alert and pay attention to the thoughts and sensations you feel and to accept them without judgement. Being mindful is being aware of the present moment.

Regularly practising mindfulness has been shown to improve mood, relieve stress, improve sleep, improve mental health, and reduce pain.

A good way to start practising mindfulness is to be conscious of your breathing. For most of us, breathing is something we take for granted. We never think about it. By focusing on our breathing, we can bring our mind to the present moment, and this is a technique that can assist with pain management. You can do it anywhere, any time. It's often useful when you are trying to sleep or waiting for your pain medication to kick in.

Mindful Breathing

Find a comfortable position. Relax your body, especially your shoulders, chest and stomach.

If you want, close your eyes. This can help you to become more relaxed and block out distractions.

Clear your mind. Put aside your thoughts, worries and anxieties.

Focus on your breath in, and then your breath out. Count your breaths if that helps. If thoughts intrude, don't worry about that, just watch the thoughts glide by, without judgement, like you might watch clouds float across the sky.

Come back to your breath, in and out.

You will feel your muscles start to relax, and your mind will begin to calm.

This is often a technique that people use as a starting point for practising mindfulness meditation.

To practise mindfulness meditation, you can join a class, listen to a CD, learn a script from a book or play a DVD or online video.

A simple technique to give you a further taste of mindfulness meditation is to do a body scan. It helps you become aware of your body in the present moment.

Simple Body Scan

Find a comfortable position. Close your eyes and relax your body.

Breathe in and out slowly and gently. Take your time and focus on smooth even breaths.

Notice how your body feels. The weight of it as you sit or lie. Keep breathing in and out, slowly and evenly.

Now focus on your feet. Notice any feelings or sensation, tension, warmth, coolness, pain, discomfort. Just notice these feelings, they're not good or bad, they simply exist. Keep breathing smoothly in and out.

Move to your legs. Focus on your legs. Notice any feelings or sensations. These feelings are not good or bad. They simply exist in the moment. Keep breathing smoothly, in and out.

If your mind starts to wander at any time, that's okay, just gently bring your attention back to your breathing, in and out. Then move back to your body scan.

Continue scanning your body, noticing each body part as you go, and any feelings or sensations you encounter. None of these are good or bad – they are just there.

Keep breathing smoothly in and out.

After you have reached your head and face, take time to notice the feelings and sensations in your whole body.

Focus on your breathing, noticing it going in and out. Open your eyes.

Practise mindfulness regularly. When you are trying to sleep, after a busy or stressful day, at your desk before a meeting, when you're out for a walk. Notice how you feel, the things around you, use all of your senses, be present and pay attention to the moment.