

If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear.

From Buddha's Little Instruction Book (Kornfield: Bantum Books, 1994)



Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. It has been adapted for use in treatment of depression, especially preventing relapse and for assisting with mood regulation (references available on a separate page).

It has been described as a state of being in the present, accepting things for what they are, i.e. non-judgementally. It was originally developed to assist with mood regulation and relapse prevention in depression and has been found to have considerable health benefits.

These exercises are designed to introduce the principles¹.

Some Mindfulness Techniques to Practice

One Minute Exercise:

- Sit in front of a clock or watch that you can use to time the passing of one minute. Your task is to focus your entire attention on your breathing, and nothing else, for the minute. Have a go - do it now.

Mindful Eating:

- This involves sitting down at a table and eating a meal without engaging in any other activities - no newspaper, book, TV, radio, music, or talking.
- Now eat your meal paying full attention to which piece of food you select to eat, how it looks, how it smells, how you cut the food, the muscles you use to raise it to your mouth, the texture and taste of the food as you chew it slowly.
- You may be amazed at how different food tastes when eaten in this way and how filling a meal can be. It is also very good for the digestion.

Mindful Walking:

- Here the same principle, while walking you concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, your breathing while walking. Just observe what is around you as you walk, staying IN THE PRESENT. Let your other thoughts go, just look at the sky, the view, the other walkers; feel the wind, the temperature on your skin; enjoy the moment.

¹ Adapted from those in Elliston, P. Mindfulness in medicine and everyday life. British Medical Journal, Career Focus, 17th November 2001.

De-stressing Exercise:

- Bring yourself into the present by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture.
- Then ask yourself: "What is going on with me at the moment?"
- You simply allow yourself to observe whatever happens. Label any thoughts that you have and then leave them alone....just be prepared to let them float away. Attend to your breathing or simply take in your surroundings instead.
- Besides thoughts, there may be sounds you hear, bodily sensations that you are aware of. If you find yourself constantly elaborating on thoughts, rather than labelling them and returning to the neutral, remember to observe your breathing.
- When emotions or memories of painful events occur, don't allow yourself to become caught up by them.
- Give them short labels such as "that's a sad feeling", "that's an angry feeling" and then just allow them to drift or float away. These memories and feelings will gradually decrease in intensity and frequency.
- More importantly, you will begin to identify yourself as an objective observer or witness rather than a person who is disturbed by these thoughts and feelings. This requires practice but can then be used whenever you are stressed.

Associated Breathing Exercise:

- Stay with any distressing thoughts for a few moments, then as you let them float away, you gently redirect your full attention to your breathing.
- Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you to move into a state of awareness and stillness.



Useful books include

Brantley, J (2003). **Calming Your Anxious Mind: How Mindfulness and Compassion Can Free You from Anxiety, Fear, and Panic**, Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

McQuaid, J, Carmona, P (2004). **Peaceful Mind: Using Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Psychology to Overcome Depression**, New Harbinger.

Hanh, Thich Nhat (1992). **Touching Peace: Practising the Art of Mindful Living**. Parallax Press.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. **Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness**, and **Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life**.

Website: www.meditation.org.au

Further titles available on the Black Dog Institute website's resource list (www.blackdoginstitute.org.au).