

What is Mindfulness and How Can it Help Me?

Mindfulness is a word that we're hearing a lot more these days. But what exactly is mindfulness and what are the benefits? Let's explore these ideas together!

Here is a **definition** of mindfulness: mindfulness means paying full attention to something. It means slowing down to really notice what you're doing. Being mindful is the opposite of rushing or multitasking. When you're mindful, you're taking your time. You're focusing in a relaxed, easy way.

All this really means is that mindfulness is about focusing your attention on one thing at a time. It seems simple, but it can actually be quite difficult to do, given how fast life moves sometimes. When we're busy, we can become stressed, overwhelmed or anxious. Mindfulness is a way to focus on one thing and slow everything down to overcome these powerful and negative emotions.

So what does mindfulness look like in everyday life? To practice mindfulness, focus your attention on one thing at a time. For example, if you're eating a delicious treat, take time to really focus on what you're eating: how it tastes, how it smells, how it makes you feel to eat it, what you like about it, etc. This is a simple mindfulness activity that we can practice every day!

If you're wondering how focusing on the smell of your food can help you, you're definitely not alone. Mindfulness can seem a bit odd or like it might not really be doing anything major to help your mental wellbeing or mental health. But it is proven that focusing your attention on one thing at a time can help alleviate stress and anxiety, help you focus on school and other activities, and can support your overall mental health and wellness!

HERE 10 OTHER WAYS TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS THAT CAN HELP SUPPORT YOUR MENTAL WELLBEING:

1. **Heartbeat activity:** Focus on your heartbeat and nothing but your heartbeat by putting your hands on your chest, over your heart. Feel the rhythm of it, count how many beats you feel. This is a great activity to use if you're feeling panicked or extremely stressed
2. **Muscle relaxation activity:** Start at your toes and go all the way up your body tensing, then relaxing one muscle area at a time. Try isolating the muscles as best you can. Doing this can help relax your body if it is feeling tight or tense from stress or anxiety.
3. **Mindful colouring:** Did you know colouring can be a mindfulness activity? Well it most certainly can! Put on some calming music, get out that colouring book, and focus on nothing but colouring for as long as you need to relax your mind and your body.
4. **Practice STOP:** The S stands for "stop", the T "stands for take a breath", the O stands for "observe", and the P stands for "proceed". By stopping, taking a breath, observing how we're feeling and then proceeding once we've taken this mindful moment, we can reset our minds in moments of extreme panic or stress. It is quick and effective!
5. **Mindful gratitude exercise:** Focusing on what we are grateful for is a wonderful way to practice mindfulness! When we are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or anxious, it's easy to focus only on the negative and forget about the positive. Taking time to think about or write about what we are grateful for can remind us that we have so much good in our lives!
6. **Positive affirmations:** Like with practicing gratitude, positive affirmations can remind us of the wonderful things we have and all that we have to offer the world and others! These can be very simple. Try standing in front of a mirror or closing your eyes and quietly saying to yourself "I am strong", or "I am smart", or "I am brave". Sometimes it can help to remind ourselves of our positive attributes when we're feeling down!

7. **Rainbow breathing:** Do you know all of the colours of a rainbow? Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet! Try taking a deep breath, then saying each colour of a rainbow in order. Go forwards, then try going backwards. With each deep breath, you're refocusing your mind, and by saying each colour afterwards, you're drawing your attention away from what is stressful!
8. **Journaling:** Try writing down how you're feeling. Focusing your attention on writing and getting your thoughts out on paper is a great way to reduce the stress you're feeling in your mind. There are tons of resources online that provide journaling prompts if you're not too sure where to start. You can also just write and write and write! Try not to judge what you're writing or how you're feeling as you go - just stay in the moment!
9. **Mindfulness walk:** Go for a walk and really pay attention to your surroundings. Don't just look around, really focus on what surrounds you as you go. Make note of the buildings, the sidewalk, the street signs, the grass, the animals, the nature, etc. If your mind starts to wander, refocus it on something new as you walk!
10. **Lion breathing:** Imagine you're a lion. It can help to get on your hands and knees and really get into a lion-like position. Stick out your tongue and let your breath flow in through your nose and out through your open mouth. Focus on the sound your breathing is making and try to still your mind.

Mindfulness techniques are a great way to support our mental health, which helps our physical health and our overall well being. Try out some of these mindfulness activities if you're feeling stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or if life just seems too busy and you need a break!