



Mindfulness Beyond Meditation:

7 Mindfulness Practices in 7 Minutes or Less

Mindfulness Matters

Mindfulness arises from non-judgmental attention to the present moment. It involves tuning in to what is happening right now, both within yourself and in your external environment. While mindfulness often takes the form of **focused meditation**, there are many other ways to incorporate this state of awareness into the rhythms of your daily life.

A growing body of **research** shows that practicing mindfulness can change activity patterns in our brains, making us better able to cope with difficulties and stressors. As educators and school staff, you spend a lot of time and energy supporting students and responding to their needs, so prioritizing your own wellness is critical. By practicing mindfulness, you can boost resilience and reduce the risk of burnout. Tending to your own well-being will ultimately help you to be more present and thoughtful with the people you encounter, including your students.

This resource outlines a few suggestions for integrating short and simple mindfulness practices into your daily life. These activities will help you to cultivate both compassion and curiosity, as part of a holistic approach to self-care.

Everyday Mindfulness Practices

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to beginning a regular mindfulness practice is the sense of being short on time. Setting aside a focused period of 30 or even 15 minutes for non-doing goes against the grain of our frantic, busy world. However, much can be gained through slow and incremental changes. The following 7 activities can be condensed into 7 minutes or fewer:



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1. Focus on Your Breath

Taking a few moments to deepen and elongate your breath can help to counter the effects of stress on your mind and body, allowing you to reset. Try breathing in through your nose for a count of seven, pausing with your inhalation for a count of four, and exhaling through your mouth for a count of eight. Repeat this cycle four times, or until you feel satisfied. To ensure that you're **breathing into your diaphragm**, put one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your belly, so that you can feel your body move. You can do this exercise seated or lying down, whatever works most effectively for you!

2. Connect with Your Senses

Like the breath, our physical sensations can act as anchors to the present moment, especially when thoughts and feelings seem overwhelming. Focusing **on each of the five senses in turn** can be a great way to ground yourself.

- Concentrate your awareness on five things that you can see, taking time to look at their size, shape, and form in detail.
- Shift your awareness to four things that you can hear, possibly including ambient noise or even the silences between sounds.
- Notice three things that you can touch, paying attention to their textures.
- Recognize two things that you can smell, which may be as subtle as the scent of your own skin.
- Acknowledge one thing that you can taste, perhaps a lingering sensation in your mouth.

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3. Visualize a Moment of Joy

While most of us experience a negativity bias that causes us to focus on upsetting experiences and events, **recalling pleasant memories** can go a long way toward building resilience and gratitude. Get into a comfortable position (seated or lying down, eyes open or closed), and take a moment to remember a time when you felt happy and alive. Visualize this moment in detail, remembering what your surroundings looked like and drawing on other sensations for a full-bodied experience. Stay with your memory, feeling it deeply. As you return to the present moment, notice any lingering feelings. This visualization is a great exercise to try near bedtime: as you reflect on your day, think about something that went well that day and celebrate it.

4. Tune in to a Relaxing Soundscape

Spending time in nature has **a very restorative effect on our bodies and minds**. When it's not possible to get outdoors, playing a natural soundscape can be the next best thing. Try playing any or all of the following recordings: rain on leaves, campfire, humpback whale, and evening crickets. Immerse yourself in these soundtracks, noticing how they make you feel. Another variation on this practice is to play relaxing music or soundscapes as part of an evening wind-down routine.

5. Eat Mindfully

The act of nourishing yourself provides a great opportunity to slow down and engage with all of your senses. You might start by taking small bites, chewing thoroughly, and **focusing on smell and textures**. Although it can be very tempting to combine eating with other activities, try to **avoid multitasking at the table**. Another variation on mindful eating involves taking a moment before enjoying a meal to appreciate the food you eat, where it came from, and those who prepared it. This doesn't have to be a religious "grace"; instead, it can be connected to choices about values such as sustainability.



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6. Express Gratitude

The simple act of saying thank you or writing a note of appreciation can shift our awareness in productive ways and help us to avoid taking things for granted. A great way to practice this form of mindfulness is to keep **a gratitude journal**. Try listing three specific things you're grateful for each day, and see how your thoughts develop over time. Consider recording not only events, things, and other people but also the qualities that you appreciate about yourself. While we tend to think of gratitude as directed towards others, it's a gift you can give to yourself too. Thinking about or writing down the things that you love about yourself can help you develop a healthy sense of self-esteem that will allow you to be more effective in caring for others too.

7. Affirm Yourself

All too often, we get stuck in negative self-talk. To challenge and overcome these limiting beliefs (which can become self-fulfilling prophecies), try repeating **positive statements (affirmations)** that help you to see your strengths and work toward desired change. These mental repetitions can help us to reprogram our thinking patterns in ways that help us to shift our behaviour. Some examples might be "I am worthy," "There is beauty in every day," "I am learning all the time," or "I can always start again," Keep in mind that affirmations are a very personal practice: they will be most effective when you choose phrases that sound credible and meaningful to you.

At their core, all of these mindfulness practices are about getting out of autopilot, changing the way you experience your thoughts, and reconnecting with your body. Like any new skill, mindfulness practices take time to develop. Be patient and compassionate with yourself, recognizing that small steps lay the foundation for profound changes.



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Further Resources

There are a growing number of evidence-based apps designed to support you on your wellness journey. Check out our recommendations below!

- **CALM** offers a wealth of mindfulness-based resources for teachers, including a thorough **self-care guide for teachers** as well as a 30-day plan for incorporating **mindfulness in the classroom**. They also offer educators a 40% discount on **Calm Premium**, a mental wellness app that provides guided meditations, relaxing soundscapes, sleep support, gratitude practices, and more, with new content uploaded on a weekly basis.
- **Smiling Mind** is a free app designed to help you integrate short meditation and mindfulness exercises into your daily life.
- **InsightTimer** is another free app that provides support for sleep, anxiety, and stress.