

‘Mindfulness’ means paying attention to the present moment. Practicing mindfulness can help you cope with everyday life and deal with tough times. There are different strategies you can use to build the practice of being mindful.

Mindfulness helps us put some space between ourselves and our reactions, breaking down our conditioned responses. This can help if:

- you have trouble focusing
- you often find yourself worrying or stressed about things
- you want to improve your mental and physical wellbeing

Why practice mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about focusing on the present and living in the moment. When you practice mindfulness, you don’t dwell on the past or worry about the future. There’s a lot of evidence that mindfulness can help you to:

- clear your head and slow down your thoughts
- be more aware of yourself, your body and the environment
- slow down your nervous system and aid your sleep
- concentrate
- relax
- cope with stress, depression and anxiety

Being mindful helps you enjoy every little moment of life as it happens, which has a really positive impact on your mental and physical health.

Simple ways to practice mindfulness

You don’t need a guru to be mindful – in fact, you can develop mindfulness during regular activities like walking, driving or even doing something as basic as brushing your teeth, having a cuppa or colouring pictures or drawing. Some basic rules to mindfulness:

- **Focus only on the present moment.** What is happening for you right now? Is your breathing fast or slow? Are you tired? Are you hungry? How do you feel?
- **Concentrate on what’s happening around you.** Do you feel hot or cold? What does the air feel like on your face? What sounds can you hear?
- **Try not to be judgemental about anything you notice.** Don’t label things as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Just notice them and let them be.

Mindful meditation

Mindful meditation involves sitting quietly and focusing on your breathing or a word or phrase you repeat quietly. Allow your thoughts to come and go and try not to judge them. When your mind starts to wander, gently lead it back to your breathing or the word or phrase you’ve chosen. You can practice mindful meditation by yourself, or if you want some guidance, try using a

mindfulness app. There are many available online or from the Google Play Store or Apple apps Store.

Mindful breathing

Take a few extra minutes to focus on your breathing. What does your breathing feel like? What happens to the different parts of your body with each breath you take? What does your breathing sound like?

Progressive muscle relaxation

This relaxation training involves tensing and then relaxing different parts of your body so that you get an awareness of how tension feels in your body.

What if I'm finding it difficult?

Becoming more mindful involves training your brain, so, like most things you learn, it can take time. Remember:

- Don't expect to be able to hold your focus for very long, especially when you're just getting started.
- It's completely normal for your thoughts to wander.
- The goal isn't to have a totally 'blank' mind; it's more about noticing and gently guiding your mind back when your thoughts do wander.
- The more you practice mindfulness, the better you'll become at it.
- If you're struggling with a particular strategy, try a different one. Every person is different, and you may find some strategies easier than others.

What can I do now?

Get into the habit of practicing mindfulness every day – even if it's just for a few minutes while you brush your teeth. A good time to set aside is first thing in the morning, or right before bed. Stick to your schedule for a week.

1. **Set aside some time.** You don't need a meditation cushion or bench, or any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills—but you do need to set aside some time and space.
2. **Observe the present moment as it is.** The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind, or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we're aiming to pay attention to the present moment, without judgement.
3. **Let your judgments roll by.** When we notice judgements arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.
4. **Return to observing the present moment as it is.** Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.
5. **Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.
6. **Then Practice, Practice, Practice**