

# Mindfulness



Mindfulness is defined as the capacity to focus one's awareness on the experiences of the present moment. The intention of mindfulness is to eliminate the mind's commentary and judgment in order to focus on what is happening. To be mindful is to be present.

Meditation and breathing techniques help individuals focus on their breathing rather than on anything else and thus help them to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judging what happens. This type of focus helps one to have a greater sense of awareness of the present moment. It helps one to not miss what is happening in one's life. Instead of paying attention to what happened in the past or being concerned about the future, mindfulness ensures that one is living one's life in the present moment.

John Kabat-Zinn, whose books are listed below, describes mindfulness "simply as the art of conscious living." While many mindfulness techniques have been described in Buddhist thought, mindfulness is not attached to a religious practice but helps individuals to accept their lives as they are and to let their lives unfold in the present moment.

Studies indicate that mindfulness alleviates pain, decreases blood pressure, and improves the immune system. In addition, mindfulness enhances concentration, curbs anxiety and insomnia, and may help prevent depression.

Brain scans reveal that people who meditate on a regular basis have increased thickness in areas of the brain that are associated with attention and with a heightened awareness of internal bodily sensations, such as muscles constricting and breath quickening under stress. In May 2009, a UCLA study found that the brains of individuals who engage in meditation have more gray matter associated with greater mental clarity and greater volume in areas of the brain that are important for attention, focus, and emotional regulation. Even people just beginning to meditate show greater activation in the part of the brain that is linked to well-being. Similar studies conducted in schools show decreased aggression toward others and increased focus and attention.

Here are two simple techniques that can help you to be more mindful. Remember -- mindfulness is a practice that requires perpetual repetition.

## Techniques

### Mindful Eating

Begin to practice mindfulness with this raisin-eating exercise.

1. Hold a raisin in your hand.
2. Observe it carefully: look at its various colors and the play of light and shadow on the raisin. Feel the raisin's various shapes and textures, and even its weight, in your hand. Spend a few minutes looking at all aspects of the raisin.

3. Now, try to remember what a raisin tastes like. Then, let go of that memory and continue as though this is your first time tasting a raisin. Note whether or not your salivary glands activate as you slowly lift the raisin to your mouth.
4. Smell the raisin, and place it on your tongue without biting it at first. Move it around in your mouth to reach all of your tongue's taste buds.
5. Now, take one bite of the raisin. Observe the feel of the raisin now, the morsel and the remaining raisin. Try to label all of the sensations that you are experiencing in the moment.
6. Slowly eat the rest of the raisin.

## Mindful Walking

The simple act of walking, when slowed down and done with cognizance, provides a tangible experience of mindfulness.

1. Inhale, and take a step with your right leg.
2. Exhale, and take a step with your left leg.
3. Continue to coordinate your breathing, steps, and movements. Mindful walking may be enhanced by repeating a phrase with each inhalation and step. For example, you might inhale, take a step, and say, "I am present," and then, with the next step, exhale and say, "In this moment." Choose a phrase that is meaningful to you. You may also simply count your steps.

## Resources

To learn more about mindfulness techniques and meditation, please refer to the following websites, videos, and books.

### Websites

#### [All That Matters](#)

A holistic center located in Wakefield, RI that specializes in yoga and other health services and mindfulness practices. Visit this website for help in taking charge of your well-being and making lifestyle changes.

#### [The Center for Mindful Eating](#)

This site is dedicated to the practice of Mindful Eating, providing myriad resources, including a newsletter and a membership.

#### [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center](#)

Here, find several online tutorials to guide you through mindful meditations that you can easily perform on your own.

#### [Whole Living](#)

This site offers information on wellness and balance, particularly regarding elements like diet, sleep, and exercise. This link will take you to an article on the Mindful Walking technique.

#### [Yoga Wiz](#)

This website provides detailed information on yoga -- its various types, poses and postures, its basics and benefits.

## Books

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Smith, J. (2005). *Relaxation, Meditation & Mindfulness Self-Training Manual*. Lulu Press.

## Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu-qZugHXfc>

An 8-minute meditation with Bridget Woods Kramer, a leading Anusara yoga teacher.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3vLZqPZxZE>

A 10-minute video featuring yoga for beginners that focuses on breathing and basic postures.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C639ArXu1iw>

A 10-minute video that features beginning yoga for stretch and strength on a relaxing beach setting.