

Lesson 1

Your Daily Dose

Introduction

Ever feel like you're living in the past, constantly dwelling on things that went wrong?

Instead of being in the present, do you catch yourself worrying about the future?

Learning to focus on the moment can be tricky when you've lived much of your life on auto-pilot. The good news is, that you can regain control, live more harmoniously, and reduce the risk to your mental wellbeing with mindfulness approaches.

In this lesson, you'll learn about informal mindfulness and how to build the skill of increased awareness into your daily routines.

Science

Mindfulness has been defined as paying attention to your experience in the present moment. It involves observing thoughts and emotions as they occur, without judgement or getting too caught up in them. Mindfulness originates from contemplative practices that go back thousands of years, including Buddhism.

Research on mindfulness is in its infancy. Studies so far, however, have shown that it can improve health, relieve recurring depression, and reduce anxiety and pain.

It's not always possible to carve out a specific block of time for mindfulness meditation, or 'Formal mindfulness'/sitting meditation every day. You can however bring awareness to your daily routines and practice 'Informal mindfulness.'

"We don't have to schedule a trip to the monastery to enjoy the benefits of stopping for bells of mindfulness. We can use many 'ordinary' events in our daily lives to call us back to ourselves and to the present moment" Thich Nhat Hahn

Experts have revealed several useful ways of fully living in the moment, including, daily washing, eating, and physical activity.

Value

By understanding how mindfulness works, you'll find it easy to build mindful moments into your day and live a healthier life.

Being aware of what you're doing as you're doing it can bring more pleasure to mundane tasks.

You'll develop a heightened appreciation of your sensory sensations as you wash, eat/drink, and exercise.

Incorporating a daily dose of mindfulness into your daily activities will help improve your attention on other tasks.

Taking action as soon as you notice you're not 'in the moment' during mindfulness practice means that you'll make every moment count. You'll not waste time dwelling on the past, or future forecasting.

Gradually, with practise, you'll find yourself calmer and enjoying even the smaller moments in the day that you once missed.

Exercises – Video – Your Daily Dose in 3 ways

Taking a pause to notice our bodily sensations, thoughts, emotions, and what's happening around us is key to mindfulness.

The great thing is, there are many moments in the day when we can bring in a little mindfulness. It's the quality of the mindfulness practice that's important rather than how long. So, we needn't worry about only taking a minute to build in a mindful moment.

In this video, we'll introduce you to three exercises. Each will take less than five minutes and can be repeated several times in the day if necessary.

Exercise 1: Wake up, yawn and stretch

We can start with a stretch and a yawn on waking up. Faking a yawn is just as good as a real one and can bring one on. Let's try it, opening our mouths wide, feeling our jaw drop to our chin as it stretches, breathing in deeply, filling our lungs with air. Our throats open up, the muscles around our mouth tighten, maybe our eyes tear-up as our open mouth puts pressure on the salivary glands. Our eyes may close, and our ears may pop.

As we reach up with our arms, our shoulders move towards our ears. Just noticing any warm, tingly or achy sensations, not changing them in any way, just accepting how it feels for us. Stretching up towards the ceiling, clasping our hands at the top, then slowly reversing the process. Exhaling, lowering our arms, shoulders, and closing our mouth. How does it feel?

Exercise 2: Showering: a touch and scent sensation

Taking a shower offers the perfect opportunity to bring mindfulness into our day. It's private and it's quiet. We'll start by stepping into a shower of cascading jets of water at just the right temperature for us. Being aware of each part of the body that the spray touches. Inhaling deeply, taking in the aromas of our shower gel, and the steam that's starting to surround us. We might be washing our hair, working shampoo into our scalp, lathering it and forming bubbles. Allowing it to sit there for a few moments before we permit the powerful water jets to rinse them away as they pounce down like heavy rainfall, melting over our head, face and body. Feeling the shampoo slip down over our skin right the way down to our toes. How are we feeling?

We can even continue being mindful as we step out of the shower, drying off slowly, applying body lotions and noticing how they feel on our clean skin. Then dressing.

Exercise 3: Mindful coffee break

We've forgotten what it truly means to taste our meals – often eating on the hop, gulping down our morning tea, shovelling spoonfuls of wheat biscuits into our mouths whilst grabbing our phone and keys and heading out the door. So let's pause and slow things down...

We all need liquid to survive. But how often do we stop and taste our drink? This exercise is so easy to do. It can help bring mindfulness throughout our day. When we stop for a drink, let's focus our attention just before we pick up the cup or mug. Folding our hand around it, or our finger and thumb around the handle. Raising the cup to our lips, feeling our lips part as we tilt the cup upwards. Smelling the aromas. Feeling any cold or heat. Taking a sip, noticing how the liquid touches the tongue, teeth, gums, roof of our mouth. Swallowing now ... How does it taste? Feeling our drink move slowly down our oesophagus into our belly. How does it feel? Is it pleasant?

Bonus tip

Before each of these exercises, start to slow your movements down and prepare to yawn, shower, and drink as if for the very first time!

Wrap

Life can be a fast roller coaster that can carry us along at uncontrollable speeds if we allow it to. Alternately, we can choose to set the pace... Take a pause ... Slow things down...

Building mindfulness into your daily routines is easy-to-implement and can make a positive difference to your mental health, life satisfaction, and work productivity.

What are you waiting for?

CTA

Over the next week, choose to practice at least one of the exercises described, to ensure you get your daily dose of mindfulness.

Our next lesson looks at the formal version of mindfulness meditation. You'll learn how to do sitting meditation in the most effective way, using breath as the anchor.