

Mindfulness – improving your mental health

When you're just getting started with mindfulness, you might wonder just what mindfulness actually is. It is basically **'living in the present moment'**.

When we talk about being *mindful*, we mean *living in the present moment non-judgmentally*. It is about perceiving things as they are. That is the core principle to understand.

Most of the time we are stuck in our heads, lost in thoughts. And we tend to think of those thoughts as something that is real. We don't see things for what they are, we see our delusional perception of reality.

Mindfulness is the opposite. When we are mindful we are focusing on the thing that we are doing at any given time. For instance, when being mindful of breath we are focusing solely on the breath. And if we *do* think thoughts, we remind ourselves that it is *just a thought* and not reality.

So what mindfulness means is this: focusing on the present moment and having a clear perception of reality.

There are many ways we can do this, including:

- Breathing techniques
- Meditation

Meditation 1

1: Close your eyes. Do not cram your eyes together. Make sure your eyes are very relaxed and that they are at rest. They should be gently closed.

2: Breathe through your nose. You might like to take a few deep breaths just to relax. Then allow your breathing to come naturally and to be gentle and smooth.

3: Focus on your breath coming through your nose. Begin to observe the sensations of your breath moving through your nose. Don't get frustrated if your mind wanders. Just gently return your focus to the breath.

4: Count to 100 breaths. You might feel rushed to get to the end. That's normal when getting started with mindfulness meditation. Remind yourself that your idea of rushing is just a thought, and any feelings are just feelings. Then continue to focus.

Meditation 2

1: Sit comfortably with good posture. You can sit on a special cushion, on the floor, wherever you like. Just make sure you're comfortable.

2: Place your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Let your wrists drop so that your hands are placed gently on your lap. What really matters is that you are comfortable.

3: Drop your chin and let your gaze drift softly downwards.

4: Your eyes: You can choose to your eyes open, to let your eyelids drop so your eyes are partially closed (three quarters closed is good,) or to completely close your eyes. But do not focus on your vision.

5: Relax for a few minutes.

6: Focus on your breathing. There are lots of different types of breathing meditations. The best is to simply focus on your breath moving through your nose. This will help you to relax.

7: Focus your mind on your breathing. Pay particular attention to how your breath flows between your lips and through your nose.

8: At times you will notice that your focus wanders. This is inevitable. When this happens, simply relax and gently bring your focus back to your breathing. When thoughts arise, accept them. Do not try and push them back and do not judge them. Just observe them and let them come and go.

9: When you feel that you need to move, or you get an itch, take a moment to just sit still. Then consciously decide to move. It's important that you consciously make the decision to move, as this will train your mind to be inwardly still.

10: Ending: At the end of your mindfulness practice, open your eyes and lift your gaze. Sit still and be mindful of the sounds around you. Notice any feelings in your body. Notice any thoughts. Take a moment and consciously decide to carry on with your day.