



Mindfulness Activities and Resources

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment. Often, we spend time thinking about the future or the past and do not experience life as it occurs around us. The practice of mindfulness helps us to stop operating on autopilot and tune in with our external environment and inner thoughts.

Research shows that practicing mindfulness can reduce stress and anxiety, reduce pain, improve sleep, and improve general sense of well-being.

The Raisin Meditation

Supplies: Raisins

Leading the Exercise:

Give each participant several raisins. Read the following script aloud in a slow, calm voice.

1. **Holding:** First, take a raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb.
2. **Seeing:** Take time to really focus on it; gaze at the raisin with care and full attention – imagine that you've just dropped in from Mars and have never seen an object like this before in your life. Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the highlights where the light shines, the darker hollows, the folds and ridges, and any asymmetries or unique features.
3. **Touching:** Turn the raisin over between your fingers, exploring its texture, maybe with your eyes closed if that enhances your sense of touch.
4. **Smelling:** Hold the raisin beneath your nose. With each inhalation, take in any smell, aroma, or fragrance that may arise. As you do this, notice anything interesting that may be happening in your mouth or stomach.
5. **Placing:** Now slowly bring the raisin up to your lips, noticing how your hand and arm know exactly how and where to position it. Gently place the raisin in your mouth; without chewing, noticing how it gets into your mouth in the first place. Spend a few moments focusing on the sensations of having it in your mouth, exploring it with your tongue.
6. **Tasting:** When you are ready, prepare to chew the raisin, noticing how and where it needs to be for chewing. Then, very consciously, take one or two bites into it and notice what happens in the aftermath, experiencing any waves of taste that emanate from it as you continue chewing. Without swallowing yet, notice the bare sensations of taste and texture in your mouth and how these may change over time, moment by moment. Also pay attention to any changes in the object itself.
7. **Swallowing:** When you feel ready to swallow the raisin, see if you can first detect the intention to swallow as it comes up, so that even this is experienced consciously before you actually swallow the raisin.
8. **Following:** Finally, see if you can feel what is left of the raisin moving down into your stomach, and sense how your body as a whole is feeling after you have completed this exercise.

Reference: *The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself From Chronic Unhappiness* by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007).

A Seated Mindfulness Meditation Practice

The mindfulness meditation technique is a simple meditation practice that can create a deep state of relaxation in your mind and body. Reducing the “chatter” in your mind will create a calm-inducing quiet.

Start by sitting or lying down comfortably in a quiet place where you are unlikely to be disturbed. Softly close your eyes. Bring your attention to whatever you feel within you and around you. Let your mind be open and your heart kind. Breathe normally and naturally. Allow your awareness to focus on your breath. Simply observe your breathing, trying not to control it or alter it in any conscious way.

As you observe your breath, you may notice that it changes on its own. It may vary in speed, rhythm or depth, and there may even be occasion when your breath seems to stop for a time. Whatever happens to your breathing, just observe it without trying to change it.

As you sit, feel the sensations of your body. Notice what sounds, feelings and thoughts are present. Allow them all to come and go, to rise and fall, like the waves of the ocean. Be aware of the waves and allow yourself to rest among them. Allow yourself to become more and more still.

You may find that at times your attention drifts away from your breath. You may think about other things or listen to noises outside. When you notice that you're not observing your breath, gently bring your attention back to your breathing. If you find that you are focusing on some feeling or mood, treat this as you would any other thought by acknowledging and releasing it, then gently bring your attention back to your breathing. Feel yourself becoming more and more still.

In the center of the waves of thought and feeling, feel yourself released from them by your focused breathing. Draw your attention to the sensation of the inhale and exhale, the coolness or tingling in your nose or throat, the rising and falling of your chest or abdomen. Relax and softly rest your attention on each breath, feeling the movement in a calm, easy way.

Let the breath settle itself in any rhythm, long or short, soft or deep. As you feel each breath, concentrate and settle into the rhythm. Let all other sounds and sensations, thoughts and feelings, continue to come and go like waves in the background. Let the thoughts pass, and gently return to the breath.

Sometime it will be easy to focus and return to the breath. Other times, you may be more focused on body sensations or thoughts or plans. Either way is fine. Just be aware of what you experience, let it come and go, and rest easy as you continue to breathe.

After you have sat for 20 or 30 minutes in this way (shorter if you are a beginner), open your eyes and look around you before you get up. Then as you move, try to allow the same spirit of awareness to go with you into the activities of your day.

The art of meditation is simple but not always easy. It thrives on practice and a kind, nonjudgmental heart. If you do this simple practice of sitting with awareness every day, you will gradually feel more centered, calmer, and more understanding of yourself and others.

Step Out of Automatic Pilot

This activity is designed to bring mindfulness into your everyday life.

Choose one activity each day that you often do on automatic pilot. Activities such as brushing your teeth, eating a meal, attending lectures, showering, preparing for bed, walking in the park are suitable. It is probably best to stick with one activity for a week or longer rather than changing the activity regularly.

When the time comes for that activity, do it in a fully mindful frame of mind. Pay attention to the activity itself, what is happening right now. With teeth brushing, you might feel the touch of the brush on each tooth and the gum, note the noise it is making, and become aware of the taste of the toothpaste. Just like in breath awareness or other mindfulness practices, if you find yourself thinking of other things, acknowledge it and return to the sensations associated with brushing the teeth.

If the activity is likely to be longer than a few minutes, such as eating a meal or walking in the park, then **practice the first two minutes mindfully.** Pay attention to what you see, the sounds you hear, the feeling of your clothes as you walk, any aromas or scents.

As a general aim, stick to the sensations present at the time – touch, sight, sound, taste, smell. You may also note what emotions and sensations you have such as breathing faster or muscle tension. At the end of the exercise, continue the next activity mindfully for as long as mindfulness lingers.

Body Scan

The body scan is easiest to do lying down, but can be done seated. Read the following script in a slow, calming voice. Pause occasionally to allow time for silence between instructions.

The purpose of a body scan is to relax and pay attention to how your body feels and what it might be telling you. Listen to your body, and be in your body as fully as possible. Sit with your back straight but not stiff, with both feet on the floor and your hands comfortably in your lap.

If it's comfortable for you, close your eyes. Listen to the sound of my voice and follow my instructions. Try to stay awake and alert. Remember to breathe completely and let the breath flow freely into and out of the body. When you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your focus back to the sound of my voice and the instructions. Now direct your awareness to your belly as it rises and falls with each breath. Breathe freely and naturally, finding your own rhythm. Feel your body become heavy as it sinks deeper into the mat or your chair on each exhale.

On the next inhale, direct your attention all the way down through your body to the soles of both feet. Become aware of your toes, the arches of your feet, the place where your feet meet the floor. Notice any feelings in your feet, any warmth or coolness, pressure, tingling or tightness. Direct your breath to your feet. Imagine that you can breathe directly into your feet. On your exhale, imagine your breath traveling through your right foot, shooting from the bottom and taking with it any tiredness or tension. On your next exhale, send the breath through to your left foot, taking with it any tiredness or tensions as it exits.

Now focus your attention on your legs. Notice any feelings in your legs, being aware of your skin, your bones, and your muscles. Perhaps your legs feel warm or cool. Now, notice the contact of your legs with the chair or floor, allowing your attention to explore any feelings in this part of your body. On the next inhale, direct your breath all the way down your entire left leg, and next, breath down your entire right leg. Now, direct the breath down both of your legs, breathing in relaxation and breathing out any tiredness and tension. Whenever you find your mind wandering, let go of the thoughts as gently as you can, and come back to focus your attention once again on your body.

Now focus your attention on your lower back, observing any feelings in this part of the body. Maybe you feel tightness, tingling, aching. Allow your attention to move slowly up your back and all the way up your spine. Bring your awareness to where your back touches the chair or mat. On the next breath, breathe into the entire back area, allowing the muscles to relax and release tension with each breath. Let go of any tiredness or fatigue, breathing an openness into your entire back.

Shift your attention to your belly. Feel your abdomen as it moves up and down, rising and falling with each breath. Take a deep breath in, filling up the belly and allowing the abdomen to fully expand on the in-breath. On your exhale, notice the feeling of the breath leaving your abdomen.

Now move your attention up to your chest. Draw your awareness to the movement of the chest with each breath. Perhaps you are aware of your heart beating. As you breathe into the chest and abdomen, draw in renewed energy, and as you exhale let go of any tiredness or tension.

Now draw your attention to the arms and hands. Let your attention rest on the fingertips of both hands, focusing your awareness on sensations of tingling, the feeling of air touching the fingertips. Maybe you feel moisture or dryness, aware of the sides of the fingers, the knuckles, the palms of the hands, the tops of the hands.

Now pull your attention up your arms and allow it to settle on your shoulders. Notice the muscles here, really focus on any sensations in the shoulders. Maybe the shoulders feel tight or tense, maybe they feel heavy or light. Breathe deeply into the shoulders, releasing any worries or concerns, and allow your shoulders to completely soften.

Now draw your attention to your head. Notice any feelings at the top of your head, your forehead, your eyes, your nose, your cheeks and mouth, your jaw, your neck. Bring your awareness to rest on any feelings in this area of your face and head. On the next inhale, fill this part of your body, breathing in positive energy and relaxing completely. Breathe out any tightness, any tension, and any tiredness.

Now expanding your awareness, feel your breath move easily through your entire body as you rest here, noticing the movement of the breath from your head to toes. Notice how the breath moves freely and easily from your feet to the top of your head. As we conclude this activity, be fully aware of your body – whole, complete, strong and at ease.

Adapted from *Learning to Breathe: A Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents to Cultivate Emotion Regulation, Attention, and Performance* by Patricia C. Broderick (2013).