



10 Basic Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. Almost any activity can incorporate some mindfulness exercises.

If you're looking for a quick and easy way to add a little mindfulness to your day without formal practice, then these exercises are for you. These can be incorporated into your everyday business, without the need for a formal sit-down meditation session.

1. Walking Mindfully

If you do any period of undisturbed walking during the day — at least ten or fifteen minutes — then you can do a little mindful walking. It'll be easiest if done somewhere with fewer distractions but try it anywhere and see what happens. As when cultivating all forms of mindfulness, it's about focusing the attention. At first, people often concentrate on the sensation of their feet touching the ground. Then you could just as easily focus on your breath or move the attention around your body, part by part. The key, though, is to develop a sort of relaxed attention. When your mind wanders away, bring it back gently, without judging yourself.

2. Mindful Eating

Try a little mindful eating! When you take the first bite of any meal, just take a moment to really pay attention to the taste.

Look at the food carefully, feel the textures in your mouth, smell it and notice how your body reacts to it. You don't need to keep this up all the way through the meal but use it every now and then to focus your attention.

3. Mindful mini-break

Checking email has now become, for many, what we do in between other tasks, sometimes as a kind of break. Change this. Instead, drop the email and practice one of the mindfulness exercises. Turn away from the computer/tablet/smartphone and sit for a moment noticing the sensations in your mind and body. How do you feel? What can you hear? Try to be present in that moment. If your mind wanders off to tasks that you have to complete or starts working over things that happened yesterday, let these go. Gently bring your mind's focus back to the present. Just be wherever you are for a few moments. Remember: mindfulness is not about trying to make sense of anything, it's about attention to that moment.

4. Listen mindfully

Any time that's convenient, try a little mindful listening. We get used to a lot of the sounds that are around us and quickly tune them out. If you live in the city, there might be police sirens, train announcements and people sneezing. In the countryside there could be trees rustling, birds calling or a gate creaking. What can you hear right now? Or, put on some music and *really* listen to it.

Try to hear the music without thinking about it. Try not to let your mind wander to things it reminds you of, to judgements about the music or think about the lyrics too much. Just allow the music to flow over you and for you to flow into the music.

5. Mindful brushing

Some things we do so often that we almost don't notice them anymore. Habits, like brushing your teeth, are usually performed automatically, while the mind skips off to other plans, worries or regrets. Instead, try to focus on that chore and really experience it. Notice how the brush moves over your teeth and the taste of the toothpaste. Another routine that can incorporate mindfulness exercises is showering or bathing. Let your senses feed on the process and bring your mind back when it wanders off to other worries or thoughts. You can perform any chore mindfully and you might be surprised what you notice.

6. Just one breath

At any time during the day, take a moment to focus on one breath. Breathe in, then breathe out. Focus your attention on how this feels, where you notice the air moving, how your chest and abdomen move. Try it now. You're not looking for a revelation from this experience; think of it more like a little mental push-up for your mind. If you want to extend it to a few more breaths, that's fine.

7. Candle meditation

Of all the mindfulness exercises, this requires a little preparation: you need a candle and a darkened room. Sit for a while watching the candle and focusing on the flame. You are not trying to stare it out or 'think' about the chemical reaction that is going on. In fact, you are not 'trying' to do anything: it's more that you are just noticing the candle in a simple, pure way.

8. Experience nature

If walking mindfully should happen to take you to a park or green space of some kind, then this is the perfect opportunity for a little more mindfulness. As you stand, sit or walk, try to become more aware of nature around you. See the different types of leaves, feel them as you pass them by; hear the bird calls, the wind and the distant rumble of traffic; sense the air moving over your skin and sun heating your face. Again, after a few moments, your mind may try to wander where it will. Be kind to yourself: gently nudge your attention back to nature and your surroundings. Many people do this naturally when they are in nature but do not necessarily label it as one of the mindfulness exercises. It's doesn't matter what you call it, as long as your attention is focused on the present moment.

9. Five senses

Focus on one of the senses, such as hearing, for five minutes. Listen to five things that you have never paid attention to before. Simultaneously, practice deep breathing. Next time, focus on a different sense and do the same exercise.

10. Body scan

Mentally scan your body from head to toe. Pay attention to each part of the body in turn, noticing any sensations that are present there. Try exhaling through the nose while performing this exercise. This can take anything from 5 minutes to half-an-hour.