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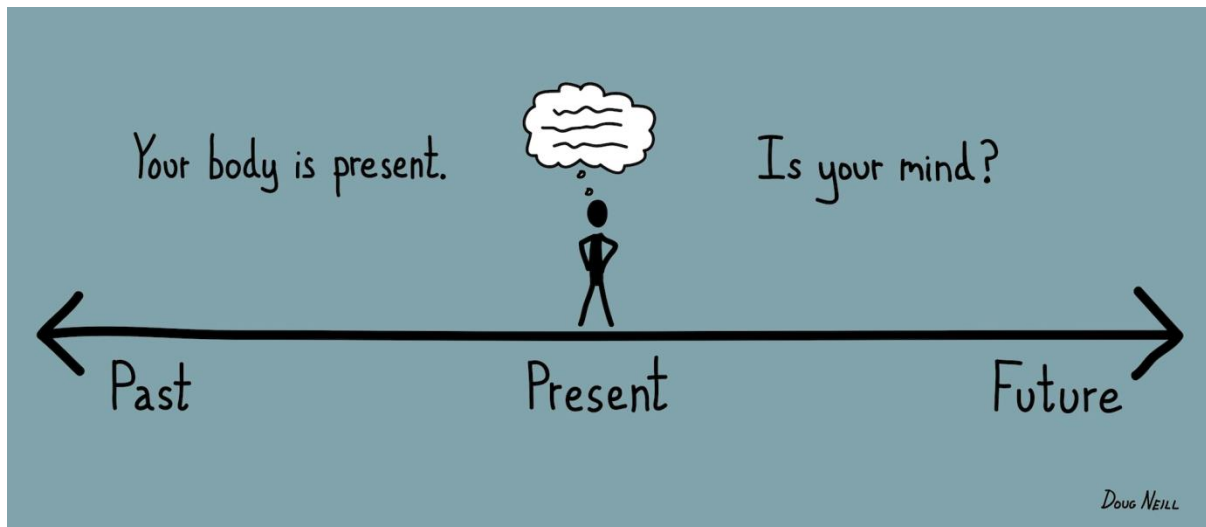
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# Mindfulness & Meditation



Mind Full, or Mindful?



*Mindfulness might simply be described as choosing and learning to control our focus of attention.*

### What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an ancient eastern practice which is very relevant for our lives today. Mindfulness is a very simple concept. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. Mindfulness does not conflict with any beliefs or traditions, whether religious, cultural or scientific. It is simply a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, and smells - anything we might not normally notice.



Mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our heads are too busy in the future or in the past - thinking about what we need to do, or going over what we have done. Being mindful helps us to train our attention. Our minds wander about 50% of the time, but every time we practise being mindful, we are exercising our attention "muscle" and becoming mentally fitter. We can take more control over our focus of attention, and choose what we focus on...rather than passively allowing our attention to be dominated by that which distresses us and takes us away from the present moment.

## Automatic Pilot



In a car, we can sometimes drive for miles on “automatic pilot”, without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really “present”, moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: We can often be “miles away” without knowing it. On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our “buttons pressed”: Events around us and thoughts, feelings and sensations (of which we may be only dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful and may lead to worsening mood. By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go into the same old “mental ruts” that may have caused problems in the past.

## Mindful Activity



If we wash the dishes each evening, we might tend to be ‘in our heads’ as we’re washing up, thinking about what we have to do, what we’ve done earlier in the day, worrying about future events, or regretful thoughts about the past.

Washing up or another routine activity can become a routine (practice of) mindful activity for us. We might notice the temperature of the water and how it feels on the skin, the texture of the bubbles on the skin, and yes, we might hear the bubbles as they softly pop. The sounds of the water as we take out and put dishes into the water. The smoothness of the plates, and the texture of the sponge. Just noticing what we might not normally notice.

This can also be done whilst walking. Notice the sights, smells and sensations in your body and be ‘in the moment.’ Thoughts will continuously intrude, but we can just notice them, and then bring our attention back to our walking. The more we practice, perhaps the more (initially at least) we will notice those thoughts intruding, and that’s ok. The only aim of mindful activity is to bring our attention back to the activity continually, noticing those sensations, from outside and within us.

## Mindful Breathing

The primary focus in Mindfulness Meditation is the breathing. However, the primary goal is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them. This creates calmness and acceptance.

*Think of your mind as the surface of a lake or an ocean. There are always waves on the water, sometimes big, sometimes small, and sometimes almost imperceptible. The water's waves are churned up by winds, which come and go and vary in direction and intensity, just as do the winds of stress and change in our lives, which stir up waves in our mind. It's possible to find shelter from much of the wind that agitates the mind. Whatever we might do to prevent them, the winds of life and of the mind will blow.*

**Jon Kabat-Zinn**



***"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf" (Kabat-Zinn 2004)***

### Mindful breathing exercises

#### Breathing Meditation 1

(Kabat-Zinn 1996)

*Assume a comfortable posture lying on your back or sitting.*

*If you are sitting, keep the spine straight and let your shoulders drop.*

- *Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.*
- *Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.*
- *Keep your focus on the breathing, 'being with' each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.*

- *Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.*
- *If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.*

When you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing. It's ok and natural for thoughts to arise, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

Practice this exercise for fifteen minutes at a convenient time every day, whether you feel like it or not, for one week and see how it feels to incorporate a disciplined meditation practice into your life. Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to *do* anything.

## **Breathing Meditation 2**

(Kabat-Zinn 1996)

*Tune into your breathing at different times during the day, feeling the belly go through one or two risings and fallings (you can breathe cool calm air in through your nose and hot air out through your mouth). Try to breathe in for 4 counts and out for 7 counts.*

*Become aware of your thoughts and feelings at these moments, just observing them without judging them or yourself.*

*At the same time, be aware of any changes in the way you are seeing things and feeling about yourself.*

## Using mindfulness to cope with negative experiences

(Thoughts, feelings, events)

As we become more practised at using mindfulness for breathing, body sensations and routine daily activities, so we can then learn to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings, to become observers, and then more accepting of them. This results in less distressing feelings, and increases our ability to enjoy our lives.

With mindfulness, even the most disturbing sensations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, can be viewed from a wider perspective as passing events in the mind, rather than as "us", or as being necessarily true. (Brantley 2003).

When we are more practiced in using mindfulness, we can use it even in times of intense distress, by becoming mindful of the actual experience as an observer, using mindful breathing and focussing our attention on the breathing, listening to the distressing thoughts mindfully, recognising them as merely thoughts, breathing with them, allowing them to happen without believing them or arguing with them. If thoughts are too strong or loud, then we can move our attention to our breath, the body, or to sounds around us.

### Finger Breathing Technique



## Mindfulness activities to help with negative thoughts

First of all, it's important to recognise that thoughts are not facts; just because you think something, it doesn't make it true. They also don't define who you are; we are so much more than our thoughts! This can be really hard to remember sometimes, because we get so caught up in them. Doing some of the activities below may help you to step back from your thoughts and see them for what they are, a mental process.

These activities focus on changing the structure or the context of the thought. Can you think of any other ways to do this?



You could start by putting the following before your thought:

"I am thinking/telling myself ...."

"I notice that I am thinking/telling myself ...."

"I notice that I am thinking/telling myself .....  
thanks for that brain!"



Try saying the thought, changing the speed. Get a bit of a rhythm going, whether it's really fast or really slow.

Sing your thoughts to a familiar tune, such as Happy Birthday, or a musical number.



Try saying your thought in a different accent. This works particularly well if you are not good at accents!





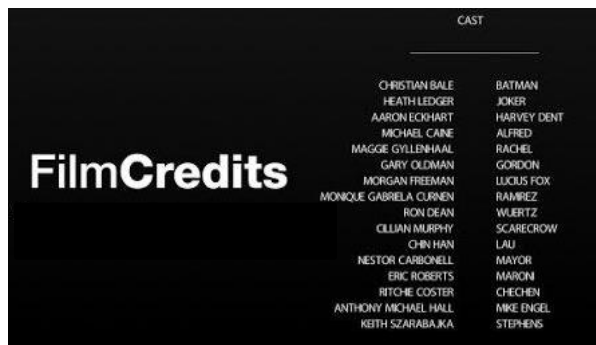
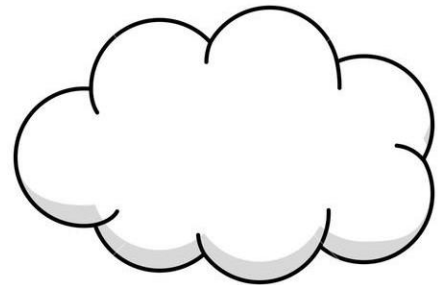
### Leaves on a stream

This is a guided visualisation which aims to aid you in letting go of your thoughts.

There are lots of versions on You Tube!



In your mind, you can label hot air balloons or clouds with your thoughts, and then watch them move across the sky until you can't see them anymore.



Imagine your thoughts as Film Credits and watch them disappear off the screen

Try writing your difficult thoughts on a piece of paper. Create a list of the difficult thoughts you have noticed that day. Once you are done, get rid of the list; ripping it up can feel particularly satisfying!



Remember to seek support with your thoughts if you are finding this difficult to do on your own. You know what will work best for you, therefore some of these techniques may not suit everybody.



## A Mindfulness Eating Exercise

If you've heard about mindful eating but aren't sure where or how to start, here are instructions for a brief mindfulness eating exercise. The following exercise is simple and will only take a few minutes.

- *Find a small piece of food, such as one raisin or nut, or a small cookie. You can use any food that you like. Eating with mindfulness is not about deprivation or rules.*
- *Begin by exploring this little piece of food, using as many of your senses as possible.*
- *First, look at the food. Notice its texture. Notice its colour.*
- *Now, close your eyes, and explore the food with your sense of touch. What does this food feel like? Is it hard or soft? Grainy or sticky? Moist or dry?*
- *Notice that you're not being asked to think, but just to notice different aspects of your experience, using one sense at a time. This is what it means to eat mindfully.*
- *Before you eat, explore this food with your sense of smell. What do you notice?*
- *Now, begin eating. No matter how small the bite of food you have, take at least two bites to finish it.*
- *Take your first bite. Please chew very slowly, noticing the actual sensory experience of chewing and tasting. Remember, you don't need to think about your food to experience it. You might want to close your eyes for a moment to focus on the sensations of chewing and tasting, before continuing.*
- *Notice the texture of the food; the way it feels in your mouth.*
- *Notice if the intensity of its flavour changes, moment to moment.*
- *Take about 20 more seconds to very slowly finish this first bite of food, being aware of the simple sensations of chewing and tasting.*
- *It isn't always necessary to eat slowly in order to eat with mindfulness. But it's helpful at first to slow down, in order to be as mindful as you can.*
- *Now, please take your second and last bite.*
- *As before, chew very slowly, while paying close attention to the actual sensory experience of eating: the sensations and movements of chewing, the flavour of the food as it changes, and the sensations of swallowing.*
- *Just pay attention, moment by moment.*

### **Useful Mindfulness and Meditation video links:**

Daily Calm: 10 minute mindfulness exercise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZToicYcHI0U>

Mindfulness Meditation for children:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk\\_qU7I-fcU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk_qU7I-fcU)

Mindfulness for anxiety:

<https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-meditation-anxiety/>

5 minutes mindfulness activity you can do anywhere:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inpok4MKVLM>

### **Wellbeing Team resources:**

#### **An introduction to Mindfulness and Guided Mindfulness Activity**

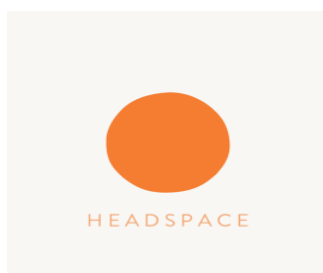
Video one: Introduction to Mindfulness

<https://vimeo.com/464133885>

Video two: Guided Mindfulness activity

<https://vimeo.com/466110187>

### **Apps to support mindfulness practice**



**Headspace**



**Virtual Hope Box**



**Calm**

**Wellbeing Team – February 2021**